

The law of killing: a brief history of Indian fascism ¹

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The permanent militarisation of society requires a permanent enemy

Hoodbhoy & Nayyar

Politics is the plastic art of the state, just as painting is the plastic art of colour. This is why politics without the people or even against the people, is sheer nonsense. To form a People out of the masses, and state out of the People, this has always been the deepest sense of a true politics

Joseph Goebbels in his novel *Michael* (1929)

The nation-state, incapable of providing a law for those who had lost the protection of a national government, transferred the whole matter to the police.

Hannah Arendt in 1948

Introduction

Is the term “fascism” relevant to India? The rhetorical use of the word has led to a semantic devaluation which is regrettable, because it can lead to a refusal to confront the reality of a fascist movement. In addition to this overused rhetoric, there is another problem, the reduction of politics to the platforms or doctrines of

¹ This essay is an extended version of an article entitled ‘Armies of the Pure: the Question of Indian Fascism’, published in *Revue des Livres*, Paris, September 2012. My master quotes are from Pervez Hoodbhoy and A. H. Nayyar, ‘Rewriting the History of Pakistan’, in Mohammad Asghar Khan, ed., *Islam, Politics and the State: the Pakistan Experience* (London, 1986); R. L. Rutsky, *High Technē: Art and Technology from the Machine Aesthetic to the Posthuman* (London, 1999) p. 68; and Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (orig. 1948) (New York, 2004) p. 365. The phrase ‘the law of killing’ is from Arendt, *Origins...* p 598. I am indebted to Jairus Banaji and the anonymous referee for suggesting improvements in the text.

existent political parties. This essay is an effort to go beyond such rhetoric, to understand the origins, forms and activity of authoritarian politics in India, and to examine whether they approximate to the fascist phenomenon. Historically, fascism has three aspects to it, viz., ideas, movements and regimes. I use “fascism/fascist” to refer to right-wing populist dictatorships marked by ultra-nationalist ideologies, the abolition of the rule of law (or its subjugation to ideology and/or the will of a supreme leader), and the destruction of democratic institutions. I also use it to refer to movements that aspire to such regimes, and the ideologies that propel and accompany such movements. In some ways the movement and its ideas count for more than the regime, because fascist activity depends upon overt or covert official support for its successes, and its complete or partial control of organs of state power only accentuates tendencies that were already present beforehand. These tendencies – dynamism, the substitution of ideas by propaganda, the constant deployment of violence, the worship of power and a capacity for self-destruction – can lead the state itself towards disintegration. Which political interests benefit from this? Why does society allow this to happen? How are these matters related to Indian political reality? These are complex questions, admitting of no easy answers.

The notion that fascism may be properly recognised only when it seizes absolute power is dangerously misleading. This is because its hold on power arises primarily from intimidation and ideological influence, and is exhibited at the very first moment that organs of state tolerate or enable illegal and violent activities of fanatical cadre or crowds. Fascism invades the public sphere with controlled mobs. It represents an assault on politics, a replacement of democratic dialogue by violent intimidation, spectacular acclamation and automatic behaviour patterns. It is a cult of struggle, violence and war; a perversion of democracy towards ‘directed’ and theatrical activism in which charismatic leadership, perpetual motion and myth are essential ingredients.²

² For an elemental summary of fascism’s essential features, see Noel O’Sullivan, *Fascism* (London, 1983).

A further peculiarity is that fascist ideology is a mixture of archaic and modern elements - but nevertheless, one that could arise only within mass democratic politics. This politics faces the question of legitimation in an age when the state is no longer grounded in the notion of divine right. Any state that appeals to this (divine) concept of sovereignty is faced with the problem of defining the agent who 'properly' represents divine law. Such an agent will automatically be above and beyond the control of the demos, or people, and hence such a polity will be something less than a democracy. In the absence of divine legitimation, conservative politics can take a populist turn which seemingly embraces democracy, but perverts it by means of a mythic ideal of the People, of the Nation, seen as a monolith with a unique world mission. Nationalism here takes on the aspect of prayer. The more it assumes such an aspect, the more it, too, moves away from democracy. Historically speaking, fascist leaders have tended to be those who are successful at deploying myths and sentiments as a means of defining the Nation. Such myths are generally militarist in nature and interpret history as a saga of victories and defeats. Nationalism, then, is the principal ideological ground of fascism. In an era of nation-states, fascism has emerged as an immanent tendency – not always successful – of so-called nation-building projects.

People and Nation

The nationalist fascination with communal arithmetic was a dominant feature of politics in the twentieth century. The Great War of 1914-18 led to the dissolution of four major multi-national empires, the Ottoman, the Tsarist, the Hohenzollern, and the Hapsburg. The statesmen who re-drew the geo-political map of the world in 1919 sought to re-arrange their component parts according to the principle of self-determination. This principle had acquired potency after the French Revolution had proclaimed the Rights of Man along with national sovereignty. Commenting on the links between 1789 and the ambivalent radicalism of the twentieth century, George Mosse wrote: 'The French Revolution...put its stamp upon a novel view of the sacred: it created a civil religion which modern nationalism made its own, and fascism, whatever its

variety, was, above all, a nationalist movement.’³ The ideal of the nation-state had a tortuous history, but by the end of the nineteenth century a powerful conviction held the world in its sway.

The nation-state denoted the disastrous marriage of territorial space and ethnic community.⁴ It was inaugurated as a principle of international law by the geopolitical arrangements of the Treaty of Versailles (1919), where Europe’s statesmen were charged with the task of setting up a new international order that would establish a sovereign Poland as well as stabilise the vast disintegrated territories of the Ottoman and Hapsburg empires. The ethnically scattered nature of the population of central, eastern and south-eastern Europe doomed the exercise from the start. It forced the Slovaks, Croats and Slovenes into artificial states such as Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia and bestowed the status of ‘minority’ upon others. This fabricated institution was the launch-pad for the invention of ‘minorities’ (which came into existence because another, larger group was deemed to be the natural ‘majority’). An article written in 1923 by an official of the League of Nations defined minorities as ‘groups of persons who differ in race, religion or language from the majority of the inhabitants of the

³ George Mosse, ‘Fascism and the French Revolution’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 24/1 (1989), pp. 5–26, at p. 5. He continues: ‘The relationship between fascism and the Revolution involved a general reorientation of post-revolutionary European politics, a reorientation adopted at first by modern European nationalism, but subsequently by many other political movements as well. The basis of this reorientation was Rousseau’s concept of the general will, that only when men act together as an assemble people can the individual be a citizen. The general will become a secular religion under the Jacobin dictatorship – the people worshipping themselves – while the political leadership sought to guide and formalize this worship. Fascism saw the French Revolution as a whole through the eyes of the Jacobin dictatorship’ (pp. 5–6).

⁴ I use the term *ethnic* in its twentieth century usage – ‘often associated with race, nationality, or religion, by which the group identifies itself and others recognize it’ (*The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*). This broad semantic range equips the word for many usages, which might change over time. President Wilson’s Fourteen Points used *nation* and *nationality* interchangeably; and the term ‘opportunity of autonomous development’ to denote what later became famous as ‘self-determination’ (a political imperative influenced by the then insurgent Russian social-democracy). In 1929, Karl Kautsky suggested that *nation* be used to designate the population of a state. ‘The further east we go the more numerous are the portions of the population that do not wish to belong to it, that constitute national communities of their own within it. They too are called “nations” or “nationalities.” It would be advisable to use only the latter term for them’. Cited in Horace B. Davies, *Towards a Marxist Theory of Nationalism* (New York, 1978) p. 6. The clear assumption here is that the nation is ethnically homogenous.

country.’⁵ It also generated what was then called ‘transfer of population’ and nowadays, ‘ethnic cleansing’. The first major instance of state-sponsored transfer was the mass expulsion of Turkey’s Armenian population in 1915, which resulted in up to one and a half million deaths. It took place during the death throes of the Ottoman Empire and the emergence of the ultra-nationalist Young Turk movement. The history of the Armenian genocide remains highly politicised and contested, although the massacres were mentioned in the text of the Treaty of Sevres (1920) between Turkey and the Allied powers. ⁶

With the formal advent of the nation-state, the state ceased to be an instrument of law and became instead an instrument of the Nation.⁷ An ideological arithmetic suffused the atmosphere of nationalist movements – and as we know, nationalism covered a wide range of inclinations, from Nazism to anti-colonialism. Due to this, in Hannah Arendt’s words, ‘nationally frustrated population(s)’ were ‘firmly convinced’ – as was everybody else – that ‘true freedom, true emancipation and true popular sovereignty could be attained only with full national emancipation, that people without their own national government were deprived of human rights.’ As a result, ‘those peoples to whom states were not conceded, no matter whether they were official minorities or only nationalities, considered the Treaties an arbitrary game which handed out rule to some and servitude to others.’⁸ She continued:

The real significance of the Minority Treaties lies not in their practical application but in the fact that they were guaranteed by an international body, the League of Nations... The Minority Treaties said in plain language

⁵ Helmer Rosting, ‘Protection of Minorities by the League of Nations’, *The American Journal of International Law*, 17/4 (1923), pp. 641–660.

⁶ http://www.armenian-genocide.org/Affirmation.236/current_category.49/affirmation_detail.html

⁷ Two excellent accounts of the minority question may be read in Arendt, *Origins...*, in the subsection called ‘The “Nation of Minorities” and the Stateless People’, pp. 344–368; and Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe’s Twentieth Century* (London, 1999) Chapter 2, ‘Empires, Nations, Minorities’.

⁸ Arendt, *Origins*, pp. 347, 345.

what until then had been only implied in the working system of nation-states, namely, that only nationals could be citizens, only people of the same national origin could enjoy the full protection of legal institutions, that persons of different nationality needed some law of exception until or unless they were completely assimilated.. the transformation of the state from an instrument of the law into an instrument of the nation had been completed; the nation had conquered the state, national interest had priority over law long before Hitler could pronounce “right is what is good for the German people.” Here again the language of the mob was only the language of public opinion cleansed of hypocrisy and restraint. ⁹

The genocidal instinct towards imaginary alien elements/ internal enemies received political impetus with the formalisation of the term *minorities* in modern nationalist discourse. There were many ideological ingredients to this exterminism, including Social-Darwinism and eugenics. But the articulation of national unity via the bestowal of an inferior status upon an entire community or communities was a central feature. The link between nationalism and war-mongering, evident in the French revolutionary wars, was vastly extended in the ultra-nationalist movements of Europe after the First World War, which came to be known as fascist. It soon became apparent that these tendencies were nothing less than ideologically enforced projects that sought to criminalize the state, do away with the liberal-democratic concept of constitutional authority, nullify the neutrality of justice and abolish the rule of law. They were movements aiming at the all-round militarisation of civil society.

Antonio Gramsci used military metaphors in his analysis of fascism, terms such as ‘wars of position’, and ‘strategic conjuncture.’ These metaphors are symptomatic of the ideological climate of modernity, but are analytically

⁹ Arendt, *Origins*, pp. 350–351.

insightful as well.¹⁰ Disdain for law and stable institutions are marked features of fascist movements, whose only 'law' is dynamism and the casting off of limits to human action, an almost worshipful celebration of the patriarchal will to power. Because of this, fascism cannot be reduced to utilitarian definitions, as an instrument of the bourgeoisie etc., rather, it is a powerful expression of the annihilationist drive endemic in capitalist modernity (there are others). More ominously, it is a populist movement, one that mobilizes the most base and destructive elements of the human spirit and mass psychology. In the words of the ex-Nazi Herman Rauschning, it is the revolution of nihilism.¹¹

Historical events do not replicate themselves in pre-determined fashion, and in any case, fascism cannot be reduced to this or that event. The growth of fascism was a prolonged development with political and institutional features that underlay contextual differences. It was not always marked by seizures of power or the advent of war. Identifying it requires an eye to political tendencies. These tendencies are visible in colonial India and its successor states, although with distinctive features. The common feature is that its successes depend more on ideological influence than organizational affiliation. In India this ideology is manifested in what we call communalism; and it includes the demonisation of entire communities that emerged in the West in the form of anti-Semitism.

Communal violence

The independence of India and Pakistan was preceded by much bloodshed. Every decade since the 1890s had witnessed communal violence, some of it spontaneous. By the 1940s the deliberate instigation of violence had begun. The Calcutta Killing of 1946, in which 5,000 to 10,000 people were killed and some 15,000 wounded, was a turning point. The violence was noted for savagery and mutilation, exhibiting the deep hatred known to accompany communal strife. Bengal was then governed by a Muslim League ministry led by Hussain

¹⁰ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, edited by Quintin Hoare & Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York, 1975) pp. 210–240.

¹¹ Hermann Rauschning, *The Revolution of Nihilism: Warning to the West* (New York, 1939).

Suhrawardy.¹² October 1946 saw massacres of Hindus in Noakhali district of East Bengal; this was followed by a pogrom of Muslims in Bihar, under a Congress ministry. The number of casualties in both instances ran into thousands, although precise figures are disputed. Thereafter the cycle of violence continued for over two years.¹³

The birth of Pakistan was seen as a victory for proponents of a Muslim Nation. It was accompanied by massacres all over north India and Bengal. Some fifteen million people were forced to migrate both ways, across a suddenly drawn border. The genocidal ‘cleansing’ of Punjab’s population along communal criteria led to a human catastrophe whose scars are yet to heal. Up to a million people were killed in 1947.¹⁴ After 1947 the killings continued, of Muslims in Hyderabad (India) in 1948 and of Hindus in East Pakistan in 1949 and 1950.

The Nizam of Hyderabad had resisted integration into the Indian Union, and his private militia, the Razakars, helped him maintain a ‘standstill’ status for a year, a period that also saw an unfolding communist insurgency. The Razakar’s brutality earned them the fear and hatred of the peasant population, and also fuelled the agitations of Hindu communal organizations. In September 1948 the government initiated ‘police action’ via the Indian Army, which routed the Nizam’s forces, but also became the context for communal warfare in a swathe of territory extending beyond areas affected by Razakar violence. In November 1948, the Nehru government deputed a respected Congressman, Pandit Sunderlal to lead an inquiry into these events. An undated letter from the Sunderlal Committee spoke

¹² See Claude Markovits, ‘The Calcutta Riots of 1946’, at <http://www.massviolence.org/The-Calcutta-Riots-of-1946>

¹³ Gandhi was active in these places, attempting to quell the hatred, halt the deadly cycle of retribution, and calm traumatised spirits. For detailed accounts of Gandhi’s activity in this period, see Narayan Desai, *My Life is My Message* (New Delhi, 2009), vol. 4, *Svarpan (1940–1948)*, chapters 11, 12 & 14; and Dennis Dalton, ‘Gandhi During Partition: A Case Study in the Nature of Satyagraha’, in C.H. Philips and M.D. Wainwright, eds., *The Partition of India: Policies and Perspectives 1935–1947* (London, 1970).

¹⁴ Ishtiaq Ahmad; *The Punjab: Bloodied, Partitioned & Cleansed* (Rupa, 2012), p. xli. A survey of Partition-related violence may be read in the *Online Encyclopedia of Mass Violence*: ‘Thematic Chronology of Mass Violence in Pakistan, 1947–2007: Section 1: <http://www.massviolence.org/Thematic-Chronology-of-Mass-Violence-in-Pakistan-1947-2007?decoupe_recherche=noakhali>

of mass instances of loot, arson, desecration of mosques, forcible conversions and the seizure of houses and lands. It stated that ‘communal frenzy did not exhaust itself in murder’; and that ‘at some places even women and children were not spared’. It mentioned a ‘well known Hindu communal organisation from Sholapur...as also some local and outside communists’ as participating in the riots and in some cases leading the rioters. It also mentioned instances in which men belonging to the Army and police participated in and encouraged these crimes. It estimated the loss of life at between 27,000 and 40,000 Muslims ‘who formed a hopeless minority in rural areas.’¹⁵

In East Pakistan, mass violence directed at caste Hindus as well as ‘untouchables’ continued through 1948 till 1950 and beyond. Jogendra Nath Mandal, Pakistan’s first Law and Labour minister, wrote that communal bias amongst officials and the police made Pakistan an ‘accursed place’ for Hindus. In his resignation letter to Prime Minister Liaqat Ali Khan (October 1950), Mandal spoke of nearly 10,000 deaths in Dacca and other districts.¹⁶ In 1949, Sris Chandra Chattopadhyya, a member of Pakistan’s Constituent Assembly protested against the Objectives Resolution, introduced by Prime Minister Liaqat Ali Khan, whereby sovereignty and authority were delegated to the State from ‘God Almighty alone.’¹⁷ The significance of this resolution may be gauged from the fact that its notion of sovereignty has been retained in the constitutions of Pakistan and Bangladesh. The targeting of Ahmadiyas for being ‘non-Muslims’ began in

¹⁵ See ‘From the Sundarlal Report’; <<http://www.frontlineonnet.com/fl1805/18051140.htm>>

¹⁶ See http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Resignation_letter_of_Jogendra_Nath_Mandal Mandal went on to say: ‘Pakistan is no place for Hindus to live in and that their future is darkened by the ominous shadow of conversion or liquidation. The bulk of the upper class Hindus and politically conscious scheduled castes have left East Bengal. Those Hindus who will continue to stay accursed in Pakistan will, I am afraid, by gradual stages and in a planned manner be either converted to Islam or completely exterminated.’ About Bengali Muslims, Mandal said, ‘They were promised autonomous and sovereign units of the independent State. What have they got instead? East Bengal has been transformed into a colony of the western belt of Pakistan, although it contained a population which is larger than that of all the units of Pakistan put together...’

¹⁷ See ‘The Speech of Mr Sris Chandra Chattopadhyya in Opposition to Objectives Resolution’, Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, 12 March 1949: <<http://criticalppp.com/archives/5788>>

1953.¹⁸ This doctrinal assertion was inserted into the 1973 Constitution of Pakistan.

The above instances are meant to trace the trajectory of communal violence – they are by no means exhaustive. In recent times, major incidents have attracted world attention (there are thousands of smaller ones) – the pogrom against Sikhs in Delhi in 1984, against Muslims in Gujarat in 2002 and against Christians in Odisha in 2008. The Khalistani insurgency (of extremist Sikhs) during the 1980s resulted in the deaths of thousands of civilians in Punjab. The RSS-led campaign for the destruction of the Babri Mosque lasted eight years (1986–92) and resulted in four to five thousand deaths. The Kashmir insurgency cost tens of thousands of lives, mainly of Kashmiri Muslims. About 300,000 Kashmiri Hindu Pandits were forced to leave the Valley in the 1990s, and hundreds of them were killed by separatist and/or Islamist terror groups. (All figures are indicative rather than precise).

These traumatic events have left deep psychological scars, and contributed to the stabilization of communal identity. Most of them have been accompanied by incidents of utmost brutality and assaults upon women and children. It is worth noting that concepts such as ‘Hindu interest’ or ‘Muslim interest’ remain fictions until they are goaded into existence by the reality of death and destruction. Fear is crucial to the fascist project, because only the dread of extinction can overcome class, caste and gender divisions in the daily lives of people of all communities. Hence fascists specialize in using hurt sentiment as a pretext for mob violence – sentiment and faith are beyond argument. The ‘hurt’ in this case is usually on account of perceived insults to tradition, religion, the nation or some other insignia of patriarchal honour. In India the targeting of artists, writers, women and young people over the content of artistic works, dress-codes and adherence to ‘foreign’ culture has been a marked phenomenon in recent years. Violent

¹⁸ For a brief history of the anti-Ahmadiya movement, see Nadeem Paracha, ‘Tracing hate’, <<http://dawn.com/2012/12/13/tracing-hate/>>. The official inquiry into the 1953 riots highlighted the erosion of criminal justice: ‘If democracy means the subordination of law and order to political ends – then Allah knoweth best and we end the report.’ See <http://www.thepersecution.org/dl/report_1953.pdf>

intimidation by both Hindu and Muslim communalists has been gently handled by the police, and has adversely affected women's safety, academic research and the creative arts.

Understanding Indian Communalism

Many scholars use prefixes such as *Hindu* and *Muslim* when speaking of communalism. Some speak only of majorities and minorities. I see it as a generic ideology, with different expressions. In colonial India, *communalism* referred to the idea that shared religious beliefs imply shared political interests. But Indians also possessed affiliations related to caste, region and language. Many such affiliations developed after the introduction of census operations by the colonial government. The latter half of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of caste-associations and coalitions and campaigns around language. Religion-based communalism emerged in an incipient contest with these, for it sought to establish an over-arching identity that would supersede caste and regional identities. It thus implied a goal, not a reality, and *communal* ideologies imagined an ideal religious unity. These had origins in what might be termed community protectionism, projects with the stated aim of educational advancement, preservation of a distinctive culture and access to administrative and political positions. These mild forms of communal mobilisation cannot be termed fascistic in inspiration or tendency. However they prepared the ground for the emergence of antagonistic discourses. When coupled with the mendacity of a colonial power in retreat, the extension of voting rights, mass populist campaigns and the climate engendered by communal riots, these relatively benign forms of thought and organisation could and did assume deadlier tendencies and structures.

The colonial conquest of India had taken an entire century, in the course of which the fragments of the moribund Mughal empire and various predatory polities were brought under a new dispensation. The complex social hierarchies in different areas, the long period of social pacification, the staggered pace of institutional change, and Britain's own historical transformation during this period, ensured

that the reaction to colonisation was highly differentiated. Remnants of traditional ruling classes could oscillate between xenophobic resistance and collaboration, and the reaction of the plebeian classes could also change from passivity to rebellion. The scholars, teachers, priests and officials of the pre-colonial order retained their sources of livelihood; and their world outlook was not suddenly transported into so-called modernity. As a colonial middle class emerged from within the traditional intelligentsia and other propertied strata, an upheaval of values and norms took place. Nostalgia for the passing of traditional monarchical power (after the Anglo-Maratha wars that ended in 1818, the Anglo Sikh wars of the 1840's, and the failed revolt of 1857) took the form of revivalist doctrines that sought to explain defeat in terms of the estrangement from pure origins. However, the relationship between revivalist and reformist trends was complex. Often the two attitudes meshed together, for both sought to explain and overcome perceived decline. What is significant is that the perception of subjugated identity was forged – at least in part – in the language and mental universe of defeated aristocracies.¹⁹

In an important account of the Indian anti-imperialist movement, Bhagwan Josh characterises nationalism as 'a non-class ideology in the sense that it was not a direct rationalisation and articulation of the distinct economic interests of a class... it is indeterminate and open-ended in terms of what precise class interest it is to serve in the long run.' He adds, 'nationalism is not superior to "communalism" just because it claims to defend the interests of many communities, unlike the latter which defends the interests of only one community. The democratic impulse lies at the heart of nationalism while "communalism" is intrinsically authoritarian.'²⁰ However, the ambivalence Josh refers to is precisely what makes the distinction problematic when the colonised people are defined in religious terms. (Who does the defining? Why and how far does the definition carry conviction?) In this case, communal ideologies and

¹⁹ A more detailed account of revival and reform may be read in my essay 'Communalism in Modern India: A theoretical examination', *Mainstream*, 13 December, 1986; available here <http://dilipsimeon.blogspot.in/2012/08/communalism-in-modern-india-theoretical.html>

²⁰ Bhagwan Josh, *Struggle for Hegemony in India: 1920–47. Vol. 2, 1934–41* (New Delhi, 1992) p. 61.

nationalism get mixed together. Thus, in the last decade of colonial power, at a point when negotiations between the major national parties were becoming intractable, the Muslim League began using the concept of ‘nation’ to define its interest – if ‘the Hindus’ were a nation by themselves as Savarkar liked to say, so were ‘the Muslims.’ Henceforth the negotiations between the Congress and the League would have to be conducted along the lines of the formal symmetry that governed relations between equals, rather than a ‘majority’ talking to a ‘minority’ – this despite the fact that the Congress did not claim to be a representative body of ‘the Hindus.’ A verbal about-turn converted an inter-community discourse into an ‘inter-national’ one. The binary complex ‘majority vs. minority’ was inverted and replicated, by means of a semantic shift that inexorably moved onto a geo-political plane. The locus of conflicting communal power-relations moved out of the fragile Indian public sphere into the domain of international law. Because this law was rooted in the concept of the nation-state (defined as a living space for a homogenous ‘national’ community), it reproduced the formal language of majority and minority. The authoritarian trend in Indian politics emerged in the openings provided by this fluid connection of the ‘nation’ and the ‘community’.

One of the earliest such ideological developments took place with the emergence of the idea of the Hindu nation. (*Nation* was still taken to mean an ethnically distinct people rather than a nation-state. As late as the 1940s it did not necessarily imply a delineation of sovereignty.) The reformist aspirations of the intelligentsia became increasingly political in the late nineteenth century. As the century progressed, outstanding literateurs took the distinctive step of naming India as naturally Hindu and Muslims as quintessentially alien.²¹ Thus, Bharatendu Harishchandra (1850–1885), despite his attempts at forging Hindu-Muslim unity, could also write a poem welcoming the Prince of Wales in which British colonialism was depicted as an act of liberation for Hindus ground by

²¹ For different accounts of the emergence of Hindu nationalism, see Sudhir Chandra, *The Oppressive Present: Literature and Social Consciousness in Colonial India* (Delhi, 1992); Vasudha Dalmia, *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions: Bharatendu Harishchandra and Nineteenth-century Banaras* (New Delhi, 1997); Jyotirmaya Sharma, *Hindutva: Exploring the Idea of Hindu Nationalism* (Delhi, 2003); and Shabnam Tejani, *Indian Secularism: A Social and Intellectual History, 1890–1950* (Bloomington, 2008).

centuries of Muslim oppression. Writers such as Vishnu Krishna Chiplunkar (1850–1882), Pratapnarayan Misra (1856–1894) and Swami Shraddhananda (1857–1926) narrated a history of Hindu society that sought to explain social evils such as *sati*, child-marriage and the caste system as survival mechanisms in a long night of Muslim rule. The word *Hindu* came to be used sometimes with a geographic, at other times with an agglomerative implication.

‘Hindustan is ours because we are Hindus’, and ‘He who inhabits Hindustan is a Hindu’ were two ways in which Hindu and India(n) were made synonymous. Moving one way, Harishchandra used the term Hindu and insisted that it meant all Indians. Moving another way, Pratapnarayan argued that Hindus constituted the real India, and clearly stated that it was by virtue of their association with Hindus that non-Hindu inhabitants qualified as Indians. Whichever way one moved along this semantic circle – and the same person could move both ways – at its centre lay an implicit communal assumption.²²

Gradually the pre-colonial state tradition was mythologised. The search for a counter-imperium led inexorably towards the contentions of an authoritarian mentality, as witnessed by the identification with Maratha, Sikh, or Sunni monarchs by sections of the intelligentsia with social roots in recently overturned state structures. These developments were not immediately political. They originated in the philosophical adjustment to the victorious colonial order on the part of the heterogenously constituted Indian intelligentsia. The *fatwas* of the Deoband ulema from the 1870s attempted to provide guidance to faithful Muslims in a context wherein the rule of the *sharia* could no longer be assured by the authority of a Sunni monarch. At a deeper level, the struggle over symbols during the formative years of the national movement carried a hegemonic aspiration. Such was the case, for example, with the competition for the appropriation of the popular symbol of ‘Chhatrapati’ Shivaji, characterised as a

²² Chandra, *Oppressive Present*, p. 125.

Sudra king by the oppressed-caste reformer Jyotiba Phule, and as *Go-Brahman Pratipalak* (Defender of Cows and Brahmins) by Balgangadhar Tilak.²³ It was also visible in the campaign for the propagation of the Devnagiri script, which represented an aspiration for Hindi to emerge as the national language. About the latter, it has been pointed out that ‘the struggle for Hindi, in a form from which its Urdu heritage was deodorised, became a means for the upper-caste groups, some of whom had substantial landed interest, to establish political identity.’²⁴

The advent of the twentieth century saw major developments in national political consciousness and colonial policy. The government partitioned Bengal in 1905 – for administrative reasons with covert political ramifications. This step sparked off the Swadeshi agitation, the first mass campaign of modern Indian nationalism. A revolutionary terrorist movement emerged in Bengal, which had reverberations among émigré Indian patriots in Europe and North America. Elite landed interests set up the Muslim League in 1906, which was followed in 1909 by the grant of separate electorates for Muslims under the Morley-Minto reforms of 1909. During and immediately after the Great War of 1914–18 there took place an upsurge of mass nationalist consciousness (partly triggered by the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 1919) that was reflected in campaigns such as the agitations of the Home Rule Leagues and the non-cooperation and Khilafat movements of 1919–1924. This period saw the setting up of the Hindu Mahasabha in 1915 and also the Lucknow Pact between the Congress and the Muslim League in 1916. In 1919 there emerged the agitation known as the Khilafat movement, which sought to protect the status of the Turkish Khalifa against British antagonism during the war. Gandhi’s endorsement of the pan-Islamist assertions of a narrow section of

²³ Tilak is revered in modern Indian historiography as the founder of a populist nationalism. Nevertheless, he was an elitist who disapproved of the entry of oppressed castes into legislatures, bitterly attacked social reformers for their campaigns over the age of consent and the question of conjugal rights, and one of the founders of the project of creating a Hindu political community. See Stanley Wolpert, *Tilak and Gokhale* (Berkeley, 1962), Chapter 3, ‘Revival and Reform’.

²⁴ Krishna Kumar, ‘Quest for Self-Identity - Cultural Consciousness and Education in Hindi Region, 1880–1950’, in *Economic & Political Weekly*, June 9, 1990.

the Muslim clergy assumed that they represented something called the 'Indian Muslim'. It also gave the clergy leverage that temporarily boosted nationalist agitation but produced baleful consequences later. Composite nationalism began to develop communal schisms in the mid 1920s.²⁵

The chief concern of communal historiography is conquest and subjugation. The ideal leaders for communalists are monarchs – this was adjusted to modernism by having permanent presidents. At the street-level, communal propaganda would evoke Hindu, Muslim or Sikh imperialism as mythic symbols of past greatness, a condition which the 'chosen' community could revive by ensuring the victory of this or that representative. Communalists always dreamt of the military subjugation of their so-called enemies. The enemy was not the British Empire, but another community. Communalism was and remains a battle over political language. It would be pointless to ask Hindus or Muslims to 'unite' if they were already unanimous. Rather, the slogans represented an attempt to *create* a communal interest. Indian communalism is not an arithmetical total of assorted fanaticisms, but a singular political style with different manifestations.

Inevitably, communalists spoke a language of inclusion and exclusion based upon religious criteria. Their style fitted well with an elite approach to the manipulation of crowds – the formula summed up in the words *affirmation*, *repetition* and *contagion*.²⁶ 'Fascism is not the product of an oppressive agenda put forward by a certain dominant group; rather, it is rooted in mass culture.'²⁷ Mass culture includes traditions of liminal identities, syncretism and co-

²⁵ A critical assessment of the movement can be found in Hamza Alavi, 'Ironies of History: Contradictions of the Khilafat Movement,' in Mushirul Hasan, ed., *Islam, Communities and the Nation: Muslim Identities in South Asia and Beyond* (New Delhi, 1998); also available here: <http://hamzaalavi.com/?p=86>. For further reading on nationalism see the bibliography provided by David Hardiman in *Gandhi in His Time and Ours* (Delhi, 2003), esp. Chapters 2 and 7, called 'An Incorporative Nationalism' and 'Fighting Religious Hatreds'. Also see Tejani, *Indian Secularism*.

²⁶ O'Sullivan, *Fascism*, p 118. O'Sullivan refers to Gustave le Bon's study, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (1896), where le Bon analyses the means by which a leader 'will imbue the mind of a crowd with ideas and beliefs.'

²⁷ Saladdin Said Ahmed, 'Mass Mentality, Culture Industry, Fascism', *Kritike*, 2/1 (June 2008) pp. 79–94 at p. 82. See http://www.kritik'e.org/journal/issue_3/ahmed_june2008.pdf

existence, but it also carries patriarchal myths, cults of glory and martyrdom, and prejudice based on identity. That is why Indian communalists constantly fought for the ‘purification’ of what they termed tradition. Examining these contests can give us insights into the means whereby the class interests and prejudices of culturally-defined elites can be ideologically reproduced as new representations of ‘the obvious’, and can reduce social plurality to the binary dimensions of *Them* and *Us*.²⁸

Communal politics in India developed before adult suffrage. In 1919 2.7% of the population had voting rights. This was extended to a mere 12% by the Government of India Act of 1935. In effect, this meant that until 1937 (when the first elections under the new regulations were held), less than 3% of the adult population had been permitted to act upon its political beliefs in a democratic voting process. A restricted electorate was the seed-bed of elitist and narrow-minded politics, and the British rulers used this to counter nationalist agitation. From the mid-1920s the government’s stance towards communal riots was relatively permissive. It also used education, textbooks and news-films to portray India as hopelessly divided.

An example of the perverse political language of communalists is their reduction of democracy to a numbers game. In India it is a commonplace that ‘democracy means the rule of the majority’, and this definition was widespread in the political discourse of the national movement. The word *majority* remains empty until we know what we are counting, but the atmosphere of the times was heavily influenced by the ideal of ethnically homogenous nation-states. The patriotic Indian intelligentsia were sure they were counting religious communities. Once absorbed into the dominant discourse as part of common sense, the concepts of majority and minority displaced other significant elements in the definition of democratic governance – such as an independent judiciary, a free press, the rule of law and a self-correcting constitution. Thus, whereas a

²⁸ This approach is developed in my essay ‘Communalism in Modern India’, available at <http://dilipsimeon.blogspot.in/2012/08/communalism-in-modern-india-theoretical.html>

liberal-democratic politics assigns the greatest importance to freedom of speech, belief and assembly; equality before the law, the right to combination and the peaceful resolution of conflicts; the ideology of nationalism tends to undermine these freedoms by downgrading them via a false counter-position of ‘national interest’ versus democratic rights. Democracy cannot be reduced to ‘the rule of the majority’ – a term that reeks of tyranny. But the pre-conception in all communal programmes is the assumption that religious arithmetic is the most significant factor in politics, and that democracy is about numbers, not liberty.

In this sense, Indian communalism was and remains a political philosophy of number. Its philosophical locus is the ideal of a nation-state with an ethnic community at its core. The minorities are *problems*, or *questions*, whose chief characteristic is that they are not naturally part of the nation. Hence they deserve constant surveillance and intimidation (in the eyes of the fascistic nationalists), or special protection (in the eyes of the moderate, or liberal nationalists). Either way, the ideology of the nation-state is a lens that casts a certain group or groups of its inhabitants as something other than ordinary citizens. We cannot assume that communal ideas denote a reality; but neither may we brush aside the fascist nature of these ideas merely because communalists have not (yet) overpowered the State. Fascism does not become fascism only when it attains total power. There is always a contestation underway, to which there is no foregone conclusion.

The national movement and private armies

The large-scale violence that marked the growth of communal politics was not a series of spontaneous outbursts. It required concerted action and in many cases was enabled and directed by well-armed militias. The existence of such groups in colonial India was no secret. An All India Congress Committee resolution in November 1947 warned that:

The All India Congress Committee has noted with regret that there is a growing desire on the part of some organizations to build up private

armies. Any such development is dangerous for the safety of the State and for the growth of corporate life in the nation. The State alone should have its defence forces or police or home guards or recognized armed volunteer force. The activities of the Muslim National Guards, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the Akali Volunteers and such other organizations, in so far as they represent an endeavour to bring into being private armies, must be regarded as a menace to the hard-won freedom of the country. The A. I. C. C. therefore appeals to all these organizations to discontinue such activities and the Central and Provincial Governments to take necessary steps in this behalf.²⁹

Two months prior to this declaration, in September 1947, the Communist Party of India published a report entitled *Bleeding Punjab Warns*. This began as follows:

What happened in the Punjab cannot be called a riot. It was a regular war of extermination of the minorities, of the Sikhs and Hindus in Western Punjab and of Muslims in East Punjab. It cannot be compared to Calcutta or Noakhali, Bihar, or even to Rawalpindi for in all these cases it was mobs of one community that took leading part in killing, looting and burning the minority in the area, their communal passions being roused to a pitch of frenzy and savagery... In the Punjab, however, in the recent biggest killing ever seen, it was the trained bands equipped with firearms and modern weapons that were the main killers, looters and rapers. These were the storm troops of various communal parties such as National Guards of the Muslim League in the Western Punjab, and the Shahidi Dal of the Akalis and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh of the Mahasabha in the Eastern Punjab. They were actively aided and often actually led by the police and the military in committing the worst atrocities... in violence and in brutality, in the numbers killed (which Syt Shri Prakasha, India's Ambassador to Pakistan places at 1 ½ lakhs) in the use of plenty of

²⁹ AICC Resolution, 16/11/1947; *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (online) vol. 97, p. 480.

modern deadly weapons, in the devastation spread over 14 districts of the Punjab and in the way in which the police, the military and the entire administration was geared not to stop the riots but to spread it – the Punjab tragedy is without parallel ³⁰

The report describes numerous instances of atrocities carried out by the militias of various parties, as well as the extensive material support (including rifles, hand grenades, sten-guns, mortars and jeeps) given to them by the Hindu, Muslim and Sikh princely states of Punjab, including Patiala, Jhind, Nabha, Faridkot, Malakotla, Bahawalpur and Kapurthala. It describes these states as ‘the hotbeds...of cold deadly preparations for a war of extermination.’ Whereas the Congress ‘became more and more tongue-tied as it moved nearer and nearer acceptance of division,’ it reported the RSS as having taken over the towns, ‘and roused the spirit of retaliation on the communal slogan of Akhand Hindustan by force’.³¹ The report names ‘financiers and blackmarketeers of the towns’ as patrons of the RSS, and ‘the most reactionary toady section of big landlords’ as backing the Muslim League National Guards.

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), or National Volunteers, was formed in 1925 by K.B. Hedgewar. It had 60,000 members by 1939, and colonial sources indicate the number had risen to 76,000 members in 1944. There are reports that the figure may have been closer to 100,000. Most of the membership was concentrated in the Central Provinces, Bombay and Punjab.³² The ideological climate that nurtured this paramilitary force was Hindu religious revivalism with its profound unease at Gandhi’s advocacy of non-violence and his assimilationist concept of Indian nationhood. The history of revivalism is a theme I will not

³⁰ Dhanwantri and P.C.Joshi, *Bleeding Punjab Warns*, pp. 5–6, in the P.C.Joshi Archives, JNU, file CPI/108.

³¹ Dhanwantri and Joshi, *Bleeding Punjab*, pp.8–10.

³² Walter Anderson and Shridhar Damle, *The Brotherhood in Saffron: the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Hindu Revivalism* (New Delhi, 1987) pp. 38, 45, 65.

explore here.³³ We may note that prominent nationalists such as Balgangadhar Tilak insisted that the controversy over means and ends was a tactical rather than doctrinal question. Many revivalists believed Gandhi's ideas and methods (which they saw as a manifestation of Christian rather than Hindu values) were bound to have a detrimental effect on the self-respect and capacity for resistance of Hindus. In 1922, for example, Dr Kurtakoti, the Shankaracharya of Karvir Peeth, declared that Gandhi's ahimsa would encourage Muslim aggressiveness, and advocated a return to the militancy that he believed had been advocated by Tilak, Vivekananda and Aurobindo Ghose.³⁴

The sub-text of these ideas was the belief that it was India's Muslims rather than the British imperialists who were the 'enemy.' The revivalists were convinced that the foundation of that nation was the Hindu community, conceived as a monolith. These doctrines implied the need for the 'community' to develop military skills. Thus V.D. Savarkar, president of the Hindu Mahasabha from 1937 to 1943, launched a Hindu Militarisation movement, for which he coined the war-cry *Hinduisse all politics and militarise Hindudom!*³⁵ In his presidential address of 1942, he asked members of the Mahasabha to join the armed forces as part of this movement, and further, to 'capture all centres of political power' such as legislatures, defence committees and ministries. Denouncing the Muslim Leagues' new demand of 'self-determination' for Muslim majority provinces, he made clear that the threat of overwhelming force was what he had in mind to keep 'Hindusthan' united:

The only organised body that had the courage to tell the Moslems that the consequences of their efforts to destroy Indian integrity would be in the long run as terrible had been the Hindu Mahasabha alone... Come out then

³³ For a survey of Indian religious revivalism see 'Communalism in Modern India', cited above

³⁴ Anderson and Damle, *Brotherhood...*, p. 20.

³⁵ See the extracts from Savarkar's seminal text, 'Essentials of Hindutva' (published in 1924), in W. Theodore de Bary, ed., *Sources of Indian Tradition* (Delhi, 1963). A pdf file of the entire text is available here: http://www.savarkar.org/content/pdfs/en/essentials_of_hindutva.v001.pdf

to assert boldly and uncompromisingly on behalf of Hindudom – that just as in America, Germany, China and every other country not excluding Russia, so also in Hindusthan, *the Hindus by the fact that they form an overwhelming majority are the Nation and Moslems are but a community* because like all other communities they are unchallengeably in a *minority*. Therefore, they must remain satisfied with whatever reasonable safeguards other minorities in India get and accept as reasonable in the light of the *world formula framed by the League of Nations*. ..no minority in India shall be allowed to demand to break up the very integrity of Hindusthan from Indus to the Seas as a condition of their participation in the Central Government or Provincial ones. No province whatsoever, by the fact that it is a province shall be allowed to claim to secede from the Central State of Hindusthan at its own sweet will.. It will be well for the Moslems even in their own interest to bear faithful allegiance to the Indian nation on the same conditions offered to other minorities. But if the Moslems mistaking the pseudo-national yielding attitude of Congress for the attitude of Hindudom as such persist in their outrageous and treacherous demand for Pakistan or the principle of provincial self-determination then it is time, you Oh! Hindu Sanghatanists, that you must proclaim your formula from the very tops of the Himalayas. ‘We don’t want Hindu-Moslem unity at all on such conditions.’... Hindusthan shall and must remain an integral and powerful nation and a Central State from the Indus to the Seas, treating any movement on the part of any one to vivisection it, as treacherous and strongly suppress it just as any movement of Negrostan would be promptly punished by the American nation!! ³⁶ (Emphases added)

Savarkar has been described as ‘the first and most original prophet of extremism in India’, who ‘pioneered an extreme, uncompromising and rhetorical

³⁶ From Savarkar’s Kanpur address in *Hindu Rashtra Darshan*, pp. 122–25; a collection of presidential speeches: <http://liberalpartyofindia.org/communal/Hindu-Rashtra-Darshan.pdf>

form of Hindu nationalism in Indian political discourse.’³⁷ It was his unwavering ideal to establish India as a Hindu Rashtra. In pursuit of this fantasy he formulated the strategy of seizing centralised power via ideological influence over the Congress, and control over crucial segments of state institutions. He evidently believed that such mechanisms could bend the Muslim League towards acceptance of the subordinate status of a minority, ‘in the light of the world formula framed by the League of Nations.’ In the face of the collapse of negotiations between the Congress and the League, he sought an explanation in the language of betrayal, and became a prime mover of the conspiracy to assassinate Gandhi.³⁸

The development of radical conservative ideals among Muslim communalists is exemplified by Inayatullah Khan Mashriqi, educated at the University of Punjab and then at Cambridge. In 1924 Mashriqi wrote an interpretation of the Koran that argued for Islam as ‘the most successful and universal principle of nation-building... the infallible and divine sociology.’ After a trip to Cairo in 1926, he visited Germany and met Hitler, whom he took to be a kindred soul. (Mashriqi translated *Mein Kampf* into Urdu). He returned to India in 1931 and organised a militia he named the Khaksars (*khaksar* means humble), on an Islamic nationalist platform: ‘In brief, the one aim of the Khaksar movement is to raise, once again after the lapse of thirteen centuries, soldiers for God and Islam... Our aim is to be once again Kings, Rulers, World Conquerers and Supreme Masters on Earth.’ In 1940 the Khaksars were involved in a series of confrontations with the police in Lucknow and Lahore. After a spell in jail and a ban on military parading, he made peace with the authorities; and shifted from an antagonistic to a deferential stance toward the Muslim League by the late 1940s.³⁹

³⁷ Sharma, *Hindutva*, p. 124.

³⁸ The official report into the assassination may be read at: <http://dilipsimeon.blogspot.in/2012/03/report-of-commission-of-inquiry-into.html>

³⁹ W.C. Smith, *Modern Islam in India: A Social Analysis* (London, 1946) pp. 238–45.

The following observations about the Khaksars depict the ideological climate of the period:

Inayatullah Khan al-Mashriqi's real breakthrough occurred...after he had changed his primary role from intellectual writer to political activist. Directly inspired by world events, he began to emphasize a militant social Darwinist reading of his evolutionist theology. The paramilitary movement that he founded upon his retirement from government service in 1931 – the Khaksars – created a stir in late colonial politics and received widespread admiration in middle-class and petty bourgeois circles all over Muslim North India. Clad in khaki uniforms and following strict military discipline, Mashriqi's organization appeared in many ways to be the Indian equivalent of Mussolini's *Fascisti* or the Nazi *Sturmabteilung*. The distinctive symbol by which they became famous was the spade, which the activists presented like a rifle in parades and used as a weapon in street fights with the police. The heyday of the movement was the years between 1935 and 1940, when they got involved in several carefully orchestrated stand-offs with government power. The essence of Khaksar political action was the creation of public spectacles in which both participants and bystanders could experience sensations of collective empowerment. On more concrete political questions, they tended to remain vague.

Mashriqi's social Darwinism, its political manifestation in a paramilitary volunteer movement and his pronounced leadership pretensions were hardly unique within the context of post-First World War India. This was a time of unprecedented political mass mobilization, of unbound promise as well as great uncertainty, when a whole generation of new political leaders was made. By the time of the Second World War paramilitary volunteer movements had proliferated to such an extent in India that there was hardly any political party or constituency without one. Despite some ideological differences, there were immediate similarities between the Khaksars and the extreme Hindu nationalists of the Rashtriya

Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), as well as with the Bengali radical Subhas Chandra Bose, who left the Indian National Congress to organize military resistance to the British during the Second World War. Within the context of Muslim politics, Mashriqi was arguably the most coherently social Darwinist voice, but his concern with militaristic self-strengthening and his rhetoric of Islamic glory continued a tradition that had become well established since the early 1910s. By the 1930s the ideological pull of fascism – and of “great dictators” more generally – was so strong that people like Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin and Pilsudski received more attention in Urdu glossy magazines than the British functionaries who actually wielded power over India. Various forms of scientism and historical evolutionism not only filled countless pages in the press, but also cropped up in various unexpected places in academic discourse. Arya Samaj Hindus and Tamil nationalist publicists (amongst others) resorted to ideas of ancient prehistoric origins and the dynamic battle of civilizations to buttress their identities. Mashriqi’s ideological and organizational project developed in conscious reference to European models, particularly National Socialism in Germany ⁴⁰

The Khaksars were but one of the latest paramilitary formations in a long history of militia maintained by political groups. The Muslim League had already established a National Guard that in the 1940s began adopting military trappings designed to project the League as an incipient state and ‘the expression and guarantor of the cultural identity of the Indian Muslims.’ The symbolism included flag-hoisting at the League’s annual sessions as a means of affirming a claim on the loyalties of individual Muslims to the ideology of Pakistan.⁴¹ The Muslim League National Guard grew rapidly in Punjab during 1946, as did the

⁴⁰ Markus Daeschel, ‘Scientism and its discontents: the Indo-Muslim “fascism” of Inayatullah Khan Al-Mashriqi’, *Modern Intellectual History*, 3/3 (2006) pp. 443–72, at 450–452.

⁴¹ Ian Talbot, *Freedom’s Cry: The Popular Dimension in the Pakistan Movement and Partition Experience in North-West India* (Karachi, 1996) pp. 70–74, cited David Gilmartin, ‘Partition, Pakistan, and South Asian History: In Search of a Narrative’, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 57/4 (1998), p. 1082.

RSS, and was involved in the organised violence that ravaged the province in 1947. In May that year, the colonial Governor of Punjab noted that ‘all communities are said to be preparing for widespread rioting, and there is much talk about “volunteers” who constitute the “private armies” of the various communities.’ An official report speaks of M.S. Golwalkar’s extensive tour of Punjab in November 1946, during which he addressed large rallies holding the Congress responsible for the sufferings of Hindus in Bengal and elsewhere, and reportedly calling for ‘the Muslims’ to be fought ‘without mercy’.⁴²

The interaction between communal politics, class and bureaucratic interests, mob violence and human psychology was complex and dynamic. Thus, notwithstanding their militarist-fascist ideology, in Punjab Khaksar leaders and cadre were reported as doing their utmost to protect Hindus and Sikhs during the worst moments of rioting in Rawalpindi in March 1947.⁴³ In other places however, Khaksar cadre took part in the violence. Indeed, this was a moment when ideological moorings were melting away, and the events are a tragic object lesson in the nihilist character of fascism. Thus, while mainstream political parties were seemingly distinct from the communal militias, in actual fact the ideological osmosis between communal groups and moderate umbrella-type organisations ensured that the former would always exercise political leverage in the latter. The relationship between the major national parties and various radical groups was complex, and altered dramatically as the withdrawal of colonial power approached.⁴⁴

The activity of armed militias during this period shows the extent to which communal fantasies acquired substance during the violence. Slogans of ‘Hindu

⁴² Ishtiaq Ahmad, *The Punjab...* pp. 130, 115, 128. The report also remarked that the RSS was ‘not anti-government and its workers did not participate in the Congress civil disobedience movement of 1942’ (p. 128).

⁴³ Ahmad, *The Punjab...*, p. 216.

⁴⁴ For the political background of these events, see David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan* (Berkeley, 1988); Ahmad, *The Punjab*, Chapter 3; Ian Talbot, ‘The Second World War and Local Indian Politics: 1939–1947’, *The International History Review*, 6/ 4 (1984) pp. 592–610.

Rashtra', 'Akhand Hindustan' and 'Khalistan' were raised and Pakistan visualised as the new Madina. Dhanwantri's Report mentions frantic efforts by the Sikhs in western Punjab to get the Akali leaders like Master Tara Singh to stop violence against Muslims in East Punjab. 'But the Akali leadership was following a policy not based on the interests of the Sikh people but which expressed the expansionist aims of the Sikh princes. The Akali leaders ignored the entreaties of their own people.. and kept on giving the boastful slogan of re-establishing the empire of Ranjit Singh.'⁴⁵ They issued leaflets in the name of the Government of Khalistan, one of which declared: 'Khalistan is the Empire of Khalsa as left by Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the Sher-i-Punjab. Every Khalsa must pledge himself to this and nothing else.'⁴⁶ Meanwhile the RSS was denouncing Gandhi and Nehru, and there was talk of Nehru meeting the fate of the Burmese left-nationalist leader Aung San, who had just been assassinated in July 1947. The RSS-Mahasabha press called for their own leaders to be appointed to the positions of Governor and Premier of East Punjab.⁴⁷

Notwithstanding the extremist slogans and military-style attacks on innocent people, what took place in 1947 was the inscription of an absolute line through the political map of India, made possible by the over-arching formal and legal authority of the British Empire. What the militias had accomplished, however, was the first large-scale act of ethnic cleansing in India. With lakhs of people murdered for belonging to the 'wrong' community, the independence of India and Pakistan was marked by genocide. Aside from its various attributes, sovereignty is a form of annihilation.

The criminalisation of the polity

A significant aspect of the situation as reported by Dhanwantri and P. C. Joshi (both members of the Communist Party of India, the former a leading Punjab

⁴⁵ Dhanwantri and Joshi, *Bleeding Punjab*, pp. 12–13.

⁴⁶ Dhanwantri and Joshi, *Bleeding Punjab*, p. 25.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

Communist), was the collapse of state institutions, primarily the police and military. Their report makes visible the impact of communal ideology on the ordinary personnel of these armed bodies of the state; and the gruesome consequences of the realisation that their officers were no longer neutral. The state was now transforming itself into the instrument of the nation, which meant the community. The situation had begun deteriorating in March 1947, with the resignation of the Unionist-Congress-Akali coalition government, and the outbreak of mass rioting in Rawalpindi. As Governor Jenkins wrote to the viceroy in April 1947, 'We feel now that we are dealing with people who are out to destroy themselves and that in the absence of some reasonable agreement between them the average official will have to spend his life in a communal civil war. The Punjab is not in a constitutional situation but in a revolutionary situation'⁴⁸ As the date of the Radcliffe Award (demarcating the boundary) came closer, uncertainty gripped the entire Punjabi population, not least the armed units of the colonial state. Policemen caught in areas expected to go 'the other way' were asked to disarm and proceed across the (as yet) imaginary lines demarcating Pakistan and India. With this implosion the chain of authority and legitimacy collapsed. Moreover, as new recruits were being absorbed into the police force to fill vacancies formed due to the migration of Muslims to Western Punjab, 'the RSS and the Akali bands are burrowing into these services. The RSS wants its own men to hold dominating positions in the east Punjab government.'⁴⁹

The communal militias were now free to indulge their most bloody fantasies. The events are a case study in fascist violence. Children were butchered, women raped and dismembered, people were murdered in the most hateful ways possible by 'armed bands, fully drunk with liquor and with the lust for blood.. roaming and falling on the poor victims actively assisted by the Hindu and Sikh police and units of the Boundary Force. Similar scenes were enacted in Lahore.'⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Talbot, 'Second World War', p. 608.

⁴⁹ Dhanwantri and Joshi, *Bleeding Punjab*, pp. 21–22.

⁵⁰ Dhanwantri and Joshi, *Bleeding Punjab*, pp. 14–15.

Dhanwantri and Joshi give details of police and military involvement in massacres, manifesting the seamless connection between formal and informal armed formations during a time when state power melted away. The militias were aided by volunteers from the princely states as well as ex-servicemen. The deadliest danger to villagers was from attacks engineered by forces and militias from outside their villages. The Report states as 'a fact that everyone who was in Lahore and Amritsar during the months of April to August would testify that the biggest arson was committed during curfew hours with the police actively assisting or passively looking on. Respectable citizens or shop-keepers who came out to put out the fire were shot down by the police, not the gangs who went about committing arson'.⁵¹ It speaks scathingly about Mountbatten's Boundary Force that was meant to keep the peace in August. 'Unchecked devastation' went on in 14 districts, in an area 'wholly under the Boundary Force'. On 13-14 August between 3000 and 4000 Hindu and Sikh refugees were shot down by men of the Baluchi regiment in the Lahore railway station, 'or they looked on while the Muslim National Guards massacred these refugees...In the same station the Dogra regiment also of the Boundary Force was shooting down Muslim refugees from Amritsar who were arriving in Lahore thinking it would be safe.'⁵² 'The fact is', said the Report, 'if the Boundary Force had not been sent to the Punjab at all, probably we would have had less people killed and less devastation. As it was it acted as the greatest single force that spread the destruction.'⁵³

The Report went on to say 'the young TU movement lies shattered', for despite many workers refusing to submit to communal animus, they were selectively dismissed by factory owners. It reports railway officials trying to foment violence amongst railway workers. One communist worker named Siri Chand, a leader of the North Western Railway Workers Trade Union, worked tirelessly for peace and to shelter refugees during the riots in Lahore. Not only did the police refuse

⁵¹ Dhanwantri and Joshi, *Bleeding Punjab*, p. 9. Also, Ahmed, *Punjab*, p. 184

⁵² Dhanwantri and Joshi, *Bleeding Punjab*, pp. 13-14.

⁵³ Dhanwantri and Joshi, *Bleeding Punjab*, p. 13.

assistance, but he was arrested, and upon release, was shot dead outside the police station along with members of his family by two constables.⁵⁴

The potential of criminal violence emanating from within the heart of the security apparatus of the state was visible long before 1947. Thus, in the Kanpur riots of 1931, it was reported that:

Communal feelings infect police both in attitudes towards mobs and amongst each other. Police authorities often refused armed escorts for relief lorries but both Hindu and Muslim policemen gave such help on communal lines, even in defiance of orders. Shri Iqbal Krishna Kapoor told the Inquiry, "I am pretty sure that if the riots had continued for a couple of days more, the Hindu and Muslim policemen would have fallen out with each other even more seriously than the Hindu and Muslim population of the town".

This report also spoke of the terrible problems created by matters such as the disposal of dead bodies, many of which were being burnt 'at the spot'. It stated that the authorities not only ignored these problems, but created obstacles in the movement of relief lorries. One witness said that that this was a departure from earlier riots, when there had been cooperation between volunteers and officials:

The impression created...was that it was no business of the police to interfere, and they wanted the people to have it out amongst themselves...Fida Ahmed Khan Sherwani said, "My impression is that the riots started on the basis of strained communal feelings; but they soon developed into hooliganism and goonda rule, providing opportunities for loot by hooligans irrespective of their communities. I saw personally houses being looted together by Hindu and Muslim goondas, and they were not cutting each others' throats. Another fact which I noted was that

⁵⁴ Dhanwantri and Joshi, *Bleeding Punjab*, p. 17.

the looting was done in broad daylight in a very leisurely and fearless manner owing to their consciousness that they were not going to be interfered with by the police”⁵⁵

The persistence of paramilitaries has been the most widespread and the least commented upon feature of the Indian polity. It is not that the politically observant Indian literati are ignorant of the existence of such groups; rather, it is the partisan and selective character of their vision that indicates the strength of communal ideology. It is this ideology that sets into motion the violent activities of controlled mobs, the rampant propagation of hateful stereotypes and the deliberate violation of and contempt for law. All these phenomena are sometimes deplored, but they never cease, nor do governments take adequate measures to subdue them. The systematic nature of the massacre of thousands of Sikhs in 1984 is well documented, as is the involvement in it of prominent Congress leaders. ⁵⁶

Thus, the violent activities of Maoists, Islamist jihadis and Khalistanis are cited as examples of terrorism, while the ideas and practices of the RSS and its various front organisations (Bajrang Dal, VHP, etc) and allies such as the Shiv Sena, are seen as exaggerated expressions of patriotic fervour. The RSS played no role in the national movement, but came into its own in the 1940s, being especially active in the violence in Punjab, Delhi and later in Hyderabad. In a ban order imposed after Gandhi’s assassination in January 1948, the government accused it of indulging in ‘acts of violence involving arson, robbery, dacoity, and murder’; collecting illicit arms and ammunition; and ‘circulating leaflets exhorting people to resort to terrorist methods, to collect firearms, to create disaffection against the government and suborn the police and military.’ The order said ‘the cult of violence sponsored...by the activities of (the RSS) has claimed many victims. The

⁵⁵ Pandit Sunderlal’s Report on the Kanpur Riots (1933), pp 322, 327, 250–251.

⁵⁶ See Who are the Guilty <<http://www.pudr.org/?q=content/who-are-guilty>>

latest and most precious to fall was Gandhiji himself.⁵⁷ Significantly, the links between the RSS and the Hindu Mahasabha were clearly mentioned in the Dhanwantri Report.

The RSS was banned again in 1975 and yet again in 1992 after the demolition of the Babri Mosque, a campaign led by the BJP leader L.K. Advani. Despite this, it remains entrenched in the Indian polity, and has not abandoned any of its ideas or altered its conduct. It remains a private army, continues to indoctrinate children and youth in “nationalist” ideas that demonise entire communities, and provides arms training to its cadre. Leaving aside the by now well-known murderous events that took place in Gujarat in 2002, the last major communal massacre - in Kandhamal, Odisha 2008, saw blatant displays of hate-speech and incitement to violence by the RSS front, the VHP. Its status as the patron of the BJP remains unchallenged. Today the RSS has a network of fronts including trade-unions, schools, youth and women’s organisations, military academies, and religious charities. It has adjusted itself to a prolonged battle for cultural and ideological hegemony. Its leadership renews itself via nomination by the preceding Supreme Leader. It has perfected the tactic of using the Constitution and state power to disguise itself (unlike the classic fascisms of the 1920s). Whenever it has access to state protection, it extends its influence in the bureaucracy, police and educational apparatus.

Then again, rural-based militias such as the Ranvir Sena and Salwa Judum are directly or indirectly supported by the state or ‘mainstream’ political parties.⁵⁸ Despite the occasional rebuke by the higher courts, local governments show no inclination towards curbing them. On the contrary, such formations have become stabilised in the Indian polity, demonstrating the truth of Gramsci’s insight: ‘A

⁵⁷ D.R. Goyal, *Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh* (New Delhi, 1979) pp. 201–202. A brief account of Gandhi’s last fast and the text of the Delhi Declaration of January 18, 1948, may be read here: <http://dilipsimeon.blogspot.in/2012/03/another-time-another-mosque.html> Also see Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition* (Delhi, 2002) pp. 142–146

⁵⁸ For further reading on this theme, see Nandini Sundar, ‘Public-Private Partnerships in the Industry of Insecurity’, in Zeynep Gambetti and Marcia Godoy-Anativa, eds., *Rhetorics of Security* (forthcoming).

weakened state structure is like a flagging army; the commandos – i.e. the private armed organisations – enter the field and they have two tasks: to make use of illegal means, while the State appears to remain within legality, and thus to reorganize the State itself.’⁵⁹ Gramsci cites the Italian Minister of War in 1932 as upholding an ideal vision of a militarized society: ‘it is the merit of the Fascist regime to have extended to the entire Italian people so distinguished a disciplinary tradition.’⁶⁰ His discussion of Caesarism or Bonapartism focused on political regimes arising out of stalemates in the class struggle, or in situations of unstable equilibrium. He recognises coalition governments as expressions of such stalemates. He also discusses the post-war (1920s) situation in Italy, with its chaotic and disorganized political movements, lack of a coherent political will amongst opponents of the capitalist order, the existence of a large number of middle-class persons demobilized from the military, and the disintegration of the hegemonic apparatus of the State.

These comments are relevant to the current situation in India and South Asia. The state is not merely weakening, but over the decades has shown a tendency to become criminalised. I refer not merely to the criminal behaviour of individual officials, policemen or elected representatives, but also to the violation of constitutional statutes such as Schedule 5 (protecting tribal lands); the officially-enabled seizure of agricultural lands for private enterprise; the establishment of and sustenance given to private militias; disregard of adverse comments against police and other officials implicated in communal violence; disregard of repeated recommendations on police reform by official inquiries, thus accelerating the decline of the criminal justice system and so on. The process of decline is coterminous with the stabilization of private armies, the most prominent of which now commands a degree of influence in politics and the administration that is unprecedented in any but the most conflict-affected countries in the world.

⁵⁹ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p. 232.

⁶⁰ Gramsci, *Selections*, p. 218.

The nation-state and the ‘minority question’ – the contrasting assessments of Ambedkar and the Communists

In September 1942, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of India (CPI) passed a resolution titled *On Pakistan and National Unity*. A Report by G. Adhikari under the same title (minus the first word) presented a detailed argument explicating the Resolution. The Resolution called for ‘all-in national unity based on communal harmony’, for which a united national front (UNF) was the need of the hour. It was based on what Adhikari referred to as Stalin’s ‘pithy but pregnant definition of a Nation,’ that read as follows: ‘a nation is a historically evolved stable community of language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture.’ The Resolution insisted that ‘in Free India, there will be perfect equality between nationalities and communities that live together in India.’ It then asked for the national movement to recognise ‘the following rights as part of its programme for national unity’:

3 (a) Every section of the Indian people which has a contiguous territory as its homeland, common historical tradition, common language, culture, psychological make-up and common economic life would be recognised as a distinct nationality with the right to exist as an autonomous state within the free Indian union or federation and will have the right to secede from it if it may so desire. This means that the territories which are homelands of such and which today are split up by the artificial boundaries of the present British provinces and of the so-called “Indian States” would be reunited and restored to them in free India. Thus free India of tomorrow would be a federation or union of autonomous states of the various nationalities such as the Pathans, Western Punjabis (dominantly Muslims), Sikhs, Sindhis, Hindustanis, Rajasthanis, Gujeratis, Bengalis, Assamese, Beharis, Oriyas, Andhras, Tamils, Karnatakis, Maharashtrians, Keralas, etc.

(b) If there are interspersed minorities in the new states thus formed their rights regarding their culture, language, education, etc., would be

guaranteed by Statute and their infringement would be punishable by law...

4. Such a declaration of rights inasmuch as it conceded to every nationality as defined above, and therefore, to nationalities having Muslim faith, the right of autonomous state existence and of secession, can form the basis for unity between the National Congress and the League. For this would give to the Muslims wherever they are in an overwhelming majority in a contiguous territory which is their homeland, the right to form their autonomous states and even to separate if they so desire. In the case of the Bengali Muslims of the Eastern and Northern Districts of Bengal where they form an overwhelming majority, they may form themselves into an autonomous region – the state of Bengal or may form a separate state. Such a declaration therefore concedes the just essence of the Pakistan demand and has nothing in common with the separatist theory of dividing India into two nations on the basis of religion.

5. But the recognition of the right of separation in this form need not necessarily lead to actual separation. On the other hand, by dispelling the mutual suspicions, it brings about unity of action today and lays the basis for a greater unity in the free India of tomorrow.⁶¹

A close reading of these documents raises fundamental issues concerning socialism and nationalism in India. My concern here is to point to the CPI's erratic conflation of nation, nationality, sub-regional and religious identity; its refusal to theorise communal politics, and its resultant decision to support what it called the 'democratic core' or the 'just essence' of the Pakistan demand. It saw the Khilafat movement as a reflection of an 'upsurge of the Muslim nationalities in the East' (p. 21), although later in the text it referred to Pan-Islamism as a

⁶¹ G. Adhikari, ed., *Pakistan and National Unity* (Bombay, 1943) p.14-15. The page references that follow in the text are from this publication. The full text of the Resolution may be read at <<http://www.unz.org/Pub/LabourMonthly-1943mar-00093>> An abridged version of the Report with the same title is available at <<http://www.unz.org/Pub/LabourMonthly-1943mar-00087?View=PDF>>

‘reactionary separatist theory’, a ‘weapon of disunity’ that uttered slogans of ‘extra-territorial loyalty’ (p. 41). It characterised the emergence of linguistic or regional demands as an expression of ‘multi-national consciousness’ (p. 27), and compared the British colony in India to the multi-national Tsarist Empire. It supported ‘the demand of every nationality for self-determination’ (p. 27) and saw its acceptance as a basis for ‘revolutionary Hindu Muslim unity’ (p. 38).

The guarantee by the Congress of the right of self-determination of Muslim nationalities...should mean for the Muslim peoples not separation from the rest of India but a more glorious and more lasting unity within a free Indian Union, in which all – Muslim and non-Muslim alike – are equal partners. (p. 44)

It stated that in 1938 the CPI had not understood ‘the real nature of the communal problem’ which it was now correcting (p. 29). Placing the word *communal* sometimes in quotation-marks and sometimes without, it stated that:

To the ordinary patriot, this new aspect of the communal problem, as a problem of multi-national consciousness, has not yet become patent. We, the Communists, are able to see our way into the future by means of our theory and our ideology. By means of this, we are able to quickly see these elements in the present which are bound to develop in the future. (p. 27)

The CPI ‘saw in the growth of the Muslim League not the growth of communalism, but the rise of anti-imperialist nationalist consciousness among the Muslim masses’ (p. 29). It criticised the Muslim mass contact programme of the Congress ‘which was rightly seen by the Muslim League as a move to destroy their organization.’ (p. 28). It supported the League’s critique of the Nehru Report (on the future constitution) on the grounds that residual powers ought to vest with the states and not the centre in a future Indian constitution (p. 29).

Their (the Muslim League's) conception of the federation for a free India was a federation of autonomous and sovereign states. Why? Because the Muslim League wanted autonomy for regions in which Muslim nationalities like Sindhis, Pathans, Punjabis, Eastern Bengal Muslims lived. It was a just democratic demand. This really is the crux and kernel of all the so-called "communal" demands raised by the Muslim League right from its inception up to the present time when they have finally been crystallised into the demand for Pakistan'. (p. 29)

The document referred to communal riots as being 'engineered by goondas in the pay of dark forces of reaction' (p. 22). The only references to fascism are with reference to the ongoing world war, wherein the USSR was on the Allied side – it is noteworthy that the period September 1942 to February 1943 was the darkest hour for the Red Army (the battle of Stalingrad was finally won by the USSR at the cost of millions of lives in February 1943). The CPI report talks of 'saving India from fascism', but only in the sense of warding off an Axis victory in the world war.

The Adhikari Report of the CPI is a dense, awkwardly written and highly confusing document. The reader can only guess at the impact it made on the Communist cadre. The only dim awareness of the implications of mixing up regional and cultural distinctions with religious ones occurs in a paragraph referring to 'the Muslim masses' fear of oppression and exploitation by 'Hindu India'. Attempting to explain this, it says, 'uneven bourgeois development creates conditions wherein one dominant nationality may be in a position to stifle the growth of less developed and weaker nationalities in a free India. We saw tiny germs of this even during the Congress Ministries...such a fear is an understandable fear' (p. 38). This implies, without stating as much, that Hindus were a 'dominant nationality'. Indeed, if people united by language and culture could still be distinguished as Muslim Punjabis and Muslim Bengalis, the same could be said of Hindu Punjabis and Hindu Bengalis. The existence of what the

document called ‘interspersed minorities’ was, predictably, to be guaranteed by statute.

Finally, a year after independence, a ‘Communist Party Publication’ printed in Bombay and titled *Who Rules Pakistan?* had this to say:

The year of freedom that has passed thus reveals that the people of Pakistan, whose religious feelings were exploited by the vested interests to reach to posts of power, are being cheated, betrayed and sold in economic and political bondage to the imperialists...The fake freedom and fake leadership have been unmasked in the last one year...the people of Pakistan, like the people of India, have yet to liberate themselves and save their country from being sold to foreign exploiters.. the Communist Party of Pakistan...carries on this fight for uniting the people in a common Democratic Front ⁶²

In 1940, B.R. Ambedkar, later to become India’s first Law minister and chairman of the drafting committee of its constitution, wrote a seminal book on the issue of Pakistan, then emerging as the dominant theme of the last decade of colonial rule in India.⁶³ The book was a fair-minded appraisal of the arguments of the Congress and Muslim League, and soon became a major point of reference, not least because it could not be assimilated to any partisan standpoint in the prevailing political firmament. I cite it at length here because it throws light upon the political perceptions of the time. Avoiding the axiomatic definitions preferred by the CPI, Ambedkar drew upon the French social and theological theorist Ernst Renan’s 1882 lecture *What is a Nation?* to focus upon the subjective essence of nationalism. His observations draw attention to the ideological content of

⁶² *Who Rules Pakistan?* (Communist Party Publication, Bombay, 1948), P.C. Joshi Archives, File CPI/147.

⁶³ B. R. Ambedkar, *Pakistan, or the Partition of India* (Bombay, 1946). The first edition appeared in 1940 as *Thoughts on Pakistan*. It was republished under a different title in 1946. A pdf copy of the book is available here: <http://www.satnami.com/pakistan.pdf>> Citations in this section refer to the 1946 edition of this book by Ambedkar.

nationalist mobilization. He spoke of 'the mysterious working of the psychology of national feeling', referred to nationalism as a 'passion', and stated that 'the Muslims have developed a "will to live as a nation".' He described the 'Hindu' view on the undesirability of partition and the history of medieval invasions of India, and criticized both Hindu and Muslim nationalism, whilst taking care to present their arguments faithfully. He used official statistics and reports on demographic, financial and political matters, including what he termed a prolonged communal civil war that spanned the period from 1920 to 1935.

Ambedkar made a distinction between nationality and nationalism, and argued

it is true that there cannot be nationalism without the feeling of nationality being in existence. But, it is important to bear in mind that the converse is not always true. The feeling of nationality may be present and yet the feeling of nationalism may be quite absent. That is to say, nationality does not in all cases produce nationalism. For nationality to flame into nationalism two conditions must exist. First, there must arise the "will to live as a nation". Nationalism is the dynamic expression of that desire. Secondly, there must be a territory which nationalism could occupy and make it a state (p. 19)

He also took the position that such recognition did not necessarily imply partition:

there may be nations conscious of themselves without being charged with nationalism. On the basis of this reasoning, it may be argued that the Musalmans may hold that they are a nation but they need not on that account demand a separate national existence; why can they not be content with the position which the French occupy in Canada and the English occupy in South Africa? Such a position is quite a sound position. It must, however, be remembered that such a position can only be taken

by way of pleading with the Muslims not to insist on partition. It is no argument against their claim for partition, if they insist upon it (p. 18)

Ambedkar stated his antagonism not only to a communalised Hindu polity, but to Hinduism:

If Hindu Raj does become a fact, it will, no doubt, be the greatest calamity for this country. No matter what the Hindus say, Hinduism is a menace to liberty, equality and fraternity. On that account it is incompatible with democracy. Hindu Raj must be prevented at any cost. But is Pakistan the true remedy against it? (p. 144)

He dwelt on the social ills of Indian Islam, and on the political life of Indian Muslims:

Muslims have no interest in politics as such. Their predominant interest is religion...With the Muslims, election is a mere matter of money and is very seldom a matter of social programme of general improvement. Muslim politics takes no note of purely secular categories of life, namely, the differences between rich and poor, capital and labour, landlord and tenant, priest and layman, reason and superstition. Muslim politics is essentially clerical (p. 118)

Commenting on the Muslim League's demands in 1938, he said: 'The Muslims are now speaking the language of Hitler and claiming a place in the sun as Hitler has been doing for Germany' (p.132). He asked 'if the Musalmans are the only sufferers from the evils that admittedly result from the undemocratic character of Hindu society. Are not the millions of Shudras and non-Brahmins or millions of the Untouchables, suffering the worst consequences of the undemocratic character of Hindu society?' (143) He went further:

Must there be Pakistan because the Musalmans are a nation? It is a pity that Mr. Jinnah should have become a votary and champion of Muslim Nationalism at a time when the whole world is decrying against the evils of nationalism and is seeking refuge in some kind of international organization. Mr. Jinnah is so obsessed with his new-found faith in Muslim Nationalism that he is not prepared to see that there is a distinction between a society, parts of which are disintegrated, and a society parts of which have become only loose, which no sane man can ignore (p. 141)

The book contains complex arguments that may be read as supporting one or other view. Aside from the use of agglomerative stereotypes such as the 'Muslim case', the 'Hindu case', 'subject race' and 'ruling race' etc., Ambedkar's observations are striking for the solutions he envisaged - a community-based referendum in the provinces directly affected by the demand: 'It must be left to be decided by the people who are living in those areas and who will have to bear the consequences of so violent, so revolutionary and so fundamental a change in the political and economic system' (p. 164). He did not believe partition to be a necessary or desirable solution to the communal problem and disliked the idea of communal parties. However, he was pessimistic about the capacity of the leaders involved to find a way out, or of the main protagonists in the drama to become amenable to reasoned argument. Hence his observations and suggestions carry an impression of pragmatism and realism. An assessment of this important work is outside the scope of this essay. The passages I cite here are not meant to provide such an assessment or to summarise its argument, but to focus on the concept of the nation-state found within it and the kind of demographic discourse it generated. (We should remember that this discourse was not his alone, but the common sense of the times, aside from being inscribed in international law). The ones most relevant to our discussion relate to the best way of dealing with what he termed 'the communal problem' and sometimes 'the minority problem':

The best solution of the communal problem is not to have two communities facing each other, one a majority and the other a minority, welded in the steel-frame of a single government. How far does Pakistan approximate to the solution of the Communal Question? The answer to this question is quite obvious. If the scheme of Pakistan is to follow the present boundaries of the Provinces in the North-West and in Bengal, certainly it does not eradicate the evils which lie at the heart of the Communal Question. It retains the very elements which give rise to it, namely, the pitting of a minority against a majority. The rule of the Hindu minorities by the Muslim majorities and the rule of the Muslim Minorities by the Hindu majorities are the crying evils of the present situation. This very evil will reproduce itself in Pakistan, if the provinces marked out for it are incorporated into it as they are, i.e., with boundaries drawn as at present. Besides this, the evil which gives rise to the Communal Question in its larger intent, will not only remain as it is but will assume a new malignity. Under the existing system, the power centered in the Communal Provinces to do mischief to their hostages is limited by the power which the Central Government has over the Provincial Governments. At present, the hostages are at least within the pale of a Central Government which is Hindu in its composition and which has power to interfere for their protection. But, when Pakistan becomes a Muslim State with full sovereignty over internal and external affairs, it would be free from the control of the Central Government. The Hindu minorities will have no recourse to an outside authority with overriding powers, to interfere on their behalf and curb this power of mischief, as under the scheme, no such overriding authority is permitted to exist. So, the position of the Hindus in Pakistan may easily become similar to the position of the Armenians under the Turks or of the Jews in Tsarist Russia or in Nazi Germany. Such a scheme would be intolerable and the Hindus may well say that they cannot agree to Pakistan and leave their co-religionist as a helpless prey to the fanaticism of a Muslim National State (p.52)

Discussing the pros and cons of the partition scheme, he said:

If the evils flow from the scheme itself, i.e., if they are inherent in it, it is unnecessary for any Hindu to waste his time in considering it. He will be justified in summarily dismissing it. On the other hand, if the evils are the result of the boundaries, the question of Pakistan reduces itself to a mere question of changing the boundaries. A study of the question amply supports the view that the evils of Pakistan are not inherent in it. If any evil results follow from it they will have to be attributed to its boundaries. This becomes clear if one studies the distribution of population. The reasons why these evils will be reproduced within Western and Eastern Pakistan is because, with the present boundaries, they do not become single ethnic states. They remain mixed states, composed of a Muslim majority and a Hindu minority as before. *The evils are the evils which are inseparable from a mixed state. If Pakistan is made a single unified ethnic state, the evils will automatically vanish.* There will be no question of separate electorates within Pakistan, because in such a homogeneous Pakistan, there will be no majorities to rule and no minorities to be protected. Similarly, there will be no majority of one community to hold, in its possession, a minority of an opposing community. *The question, therefore, is one of demarcation of boundaries and reduces itself to this: Is it possible for the boundaries of Pakistan to be so fixed, that instead of producing a mixed state composed of majorities and minorities, with all the evils attendant upon it, Pakistan will be an ethnic state composed of one homogeneous community, namely Muslims?* The answer is that in a large part of the area affected by the project of the League, a homogeneous state can be created by shifting merely the boundaries, and in the rest, homogeneity can be produced by shifting only the population (p.52) (Emphases added)

Ambedkar's solution to what he called 'the evils inseparable from a mixed state' was the transfer of minorities, which he deemed 'the only lasting remedy for communal peace':

Some scoff at the idea of the shifting and exchange of population. But those who scoff can hardly be aware of the complications, which a minority problem gives rise to and the failures attendant upon almost all the efforts made to protect them. The constitutions of the post-war states, as well as of the older states in Europe which had a minority problem, proceeded on the assumption that constitutional safeguards for minorities should suffice for their protection and so the constitutions of most of the new states with majorities and minorities were studded with long lists of fundamental rights and safeguards to see that they were not violated by the majorities. What was the experience? Experience showed that safeguards did not save the minorities. *Experience showed that even a ruthless war on the minorities did not solve the problem. The states then agreed that the best way to solve it was for each to exchange its alien minorities within its border, for its own which was without its border, with a view to bring about homogeneous States. This is what happened in Turkey, (sic) Greece and Bulgaria.* Those, who scoff at the idea of transfer of population, will do well to study the history of the minority problem, as it arose between Turkey, (sic) Greece and Bulgaria. If they do, they will find that these countries found that *the only effective way of solving the minorities problem lay in exchange of population.* The task undertaken by the three countries was by no means a minor operation. It involved the transfer of some 20 million people from one habitat to another. But undaunted, the three shouldered the task and carried it to a successful end because they felt that the considerations of communal peace must outweigh every other consideration.. *That the transfer of minorities is the only lasting remedy for communal peace is beyond doubt. If that is so, there is no reason why the Hindus and the Muslims should keep on trading in safeguards which have proved so unsafe.* If small countries,

with limited resources like Greece, Turkey and Bulgaria, were capable of such an undertaking, there is no reason to suppose that what they did cannot be accomplished by Indians. *After all, the population involved is inconsiderable and because some obstacles require to be removed, it would be the height of folly to give up so sure a way to communal peace* (p.53) (Emphases added).

In answer to the hypothetical query “How will it affect the position of the forty-five million Muslims in Hindustan proper?”, Ambedkar said:

The answer given by the Muslims of Hindustan is equally clear. They say, “We are not weakened by the separation of Muslims into Pakistan and Hindustan. We are better protected by the existence of separate Islamic States on the Eastern and Western borders of Hindustan than we are by their submersion in Hindustan.” Who can say that they are wrong? *Has it not been shown that Germany as an outside state was better able to protect the Sudeten Germans in Czechoslovakia than the Sudetens were able to do themselves?* Be that as it may, the question does not concern the Hindus. The question that concerns the Hindus is: How far does the creation of Pakistan remove the communal question from Hindustan? That is a very legitimate question and must be considered. It must be admitted that by the creation of Pakistan, Hindustan is not freed of the communal question. While Pakistan can be made a homogeneous state by redrawing its boundaries, Hindustan must remain a composite state. The Musalmans are scattered all over Hindustan – though they are mostly congregated in towns – and no ingenuity in the matter of redrawing of boundaries can make it homogeneous. *The only way to make Hindustan homogeneous is to arrange for exchange of population.* Until that is done, it must be admitted that even with the creation of Pakistan, the problem of majority *vs.* minority will remain in Hindustan as before and will continue to produce disharmony in the body politic of Hindustan (p. 54) (Emphases added).

These well-reasoned arguments appear perfectly logical, but *only when seen against the template of an ethnically homogenous nation*. Ambedkar saw the nation-state in the form imagined in the Paris peace conference of 1919, a homogenous union of ethnicity and territory. One telling observation on this political phenomenon (made in a recent book review) is as follows:

In 1918, the remnants of the multinational Habsburg and Ottoman empires were carved into sovereign nation-states, in accordance with the Wilsonian ideal of “national self-determination”. As Hannah Arendt perceptively argued, the world stood convinced in 1918 that “true freedom, true emancipation, and true popular sovereignty could be attained only with full national emancipation, and that people without their own national government were deprived of human rights.” The problem with this principle was that borders and nations were not neatly aligned in Eastern and Central Europe. Citizens of the Habsburg Empire’s many linguistic, national and confessional groups were hopelessly intermingled. In many cases it was not even clear who belonged to what nation, because so many citizens of the empire were bilingual or indifferent to nationalism. Equally important, in spite of the rhetoric of national self-determination, the frontiers of the new successor states had been drawn with geopolitical imperatives in mind. Even though German speakers formed an absolute majority in the borderlands of Czechoslovakia (which would come to be known as the Sudetenland), and most wanted to join the Austrian rump state, the region was forcibly annexed to Czechoslovakia for the sake of the state’s economic viability. A new so-called “minority problem” was born in interwar Eastern Europe.⁶⁴

What is remarkable is that Ambedkar assessed the settlement between Greece and Turkey (made in Lausanne 1923) to be a success, and used it to argue that the

⁶⁴ Tara Zehra, ‘A Brutal Peace’, review of R.M. Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*.
<http://www.thenation.com/article/171484/brutal-peace-postwar-expulsions-germans#>

‘transfer of minorities was the only lasting remedy for communal peace.’ He also seemed to think that the scale of population involved in the Indian case was ‘inconsiderable’. The Versailles Treaty had allocated parts of the defunct Ottoman Empire to Greece as a strategic measure. The Lausanne agreement followed the successful Turkish eviction (by the new Kemalist regime) of Greece from Anatolia in 1922. Even in the mid 1920s, it was apparent that Lausanne ‘did little more than ratify a state of affairs that already existed. Of the 1.2 million ethnic Greeks affected by the convention, all but 190,000 had taken refuge in Greece before the fighting concluded. The number of Turks living in lands under Greek administration was only about 350,000. The physical removals, therefore, involved only about half a million people, a far cry from the numbers that would require to be moved after the Second World War.’⁶⁵ Lord Curzon, ex Viceroy of India, who was then Britain’s Secretary for Foreign Affairs, is quoted as saying that the driving out of peoples was ‘a thoroughly bad and vicious solution, for which the world will pay a heavy penalty for a hundred years to come’.⁶⁶

The world war was in full spate whilst Ambedkar was writing his book on Pakistan, and the ideal of ethnic homogeneity was unraveling by the day, as he himself recognised. He must have known that the Sudetenland was seized by Germany in 1938, and the rest of Czechoslovakia annexed in 1939. Despite this, he was able without irony to cite Sudetenland as an example of the assured safety of a minority because of the proximity of a powerful neighbour with a shared ethnic demography. If Ambedkar indeed saw the transfer of Muslims en masse to Pakistan and of Hindus to India as a lasting solution to the communal question and moreover, considered the numbers involved to be slight, one can only remark upon the ideological impact that the nation-statist ideal had wrought upon the times.

The fascist mindset of communalists

⁶⁵ R.M. Douglas, *Orderly and Humane: The Expulsion of the Germans after the Second World War* (Yale, 2012) pp. 71ff., where the author goes on to say, ‘the Lausanne transfer was in many respects a fiasco’.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 72.

The term ‘reactionary’, when used to refer to ultra-right-wing movements, gives the impression that fascism is somehow linked with an antipathy to modernity. This is a misconception. Just as there are socialist critiques of modernity tinted with nostalgia for the pre-capitalist past, there are conservative ideological currents that embrace modernity for its technicism, at the same time as they redefine the ‘nation’ and ‘community’ for completely novel political purposes. We need, therefore, to pay attention to radicalised conservatism and reactionary modernism.⁶⁷ Thus, V.D. Savarkar, who remains the foremost symbolic mascot of the Hindu nationalists, was by no means an opponent of modernity. In contrast to the rhetoric of his RSS acolytes (who continue to hark back to ‘ancient Hindu values’ and so on, and tend to blame modernity for all misfortunes), Savarkar defined progress ‘in terms of European nationalism, constitutional practices, science, technology, theories of governance and the military and social revolution all this had brought about.’⁶⁸ He was also inspired by the Victorian English philosopher Herbert Spencer, the prime exponent of Social-Darwinism and the man who coined the phrase ‘survival of the fittest’.⁶⁹ Social-Darwinism is an unpalatable world-view, but there was nothing ‘traditional’ about it – it was a very modern ideological ingredient of racist theories of imperialism as well as Nazism.

Savarkar’s strategy for ‘capturing centres of power’ has been adopted by the RSS/BJP. K. B. Hedgewar, the founder of the RSS, was another proponent of Hindu Nationalism, a doctrine which propagates sacralised geography and racist nationhood. It sees Hindus as the national race and Muslims, Christians and communists as alien elements. Hedgewar’s successor M.S. Golwalkar developed the ideal of *Hindu Rashtra*, in which the nation is venerated as an

⁶⁷ A historical introduction to this theme may be read in Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge, 1984).

⁶⁸ Jyotirmaya Sharma, *Hindutva: Exploring the Idea of Hindu Nationalism* (New Delhi, 2003) p. 136.

⁶⁹ Ibid. Chapter 5 of Sharma’s book deals with Savarkar’s ideas.

object of worship. Golwalkar was contemptuous of political activity, and although after the 1948 ban he went along with the decision of sections of the movement to join political life, he remained convinced of the need to attain his ideal via cultural hegemony.⁷⁰

Both Hindu and Muslim communalists used the plight of Europe's Jews to make a point about unwanted minorities. Savarkar was quoted by the Nazi press in 1939 as arguing: 'A Nation is formed by a majority living therein. What did the Jews do in Germany? They being in minority were driven out from Germany'. In December 1939, he had said: 'Indian Muslims are on the whole more inclined to identify themselves and their interests with Muslims outside India than Hindus who live next door, like Jews in Germany.' He supported the Nazi annexation of Sudetenland, and in March 1939 announced the aspiration that 'Germany's crusade against the enemies of Aryan culture will bring all the Aryan nations of the world to their senses and awaken the Indian Hindus for the restoration of their lost glory.' And in 1939 Golwalkar was to declare his approval of Hitler's treatment of the Jews:

German national pride has now become the topic of the day. To keep up the purity of the nation and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of the semitic races – the Jews. National pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany has also shown how well-nigh impossible it is for races and cultures, having differences...to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindustan to learn and profit by.⁷¹

Nazi propaganda was equally influential with Muslim communalists. Thus,

⁷⁰ Jyotirmaya Sharma, *Terrifying Vision: M.S. Golwalkar, the RSS and India* (New Delhi, 2007).

⁷¹ Marzia Casolari, 'Hindutva's Foreign Tie-up in the 1930s: Archival Evidence', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 35/4 (Jan. 22–28, 2000), pp. 218–28, at 223–224. Available online at <http://www.sacw.net/DC/CommunalismCollection/ArticlesArchive/casolari.pdf>

During the Chamberlain regime there appeared irresponsible statements as these, reminiscent of German national socialist cries: “Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru’s visits to England and other countries in Europe have been cleverly stage-managed by Leftist groups supported by prominent publicity through the Jewish press Reuter.”; the Congress’s “final objective, viz., establishment of Hindu supremacy under British protection in complicity with Bolshevik Russia and other communist agencies.” In Sind, “the Hindus will have to be eradicated like the Jews in Germany if they did not behave properly.”⁷²

In 1950, Pakistan’s first Law minister Jogindranath Mandal, an ‘untouchable’ leader who had joined the Muslim League, resigned his position. His letter to Prime Minister Liaqat Ali Khan (see above, n.16) condemned the atrocities committed on Hindus in East Pakistan. Among his allegations was the complaint that Moulana Akram Khan, President of the Provincial Muslim League, had cited the holy Prophet asking for Jews to be driven away from Arabia. As we have seen, B.R. Ambedkar had precisely this in mind when he stated that ‘the position of the Hindus in Pakistan may easily become similar to the position of the Armenians under the Turks or of the Jews in Tsarist Russia or in Nazi Germany.’

Indian public opinion is not particularly well-informed about the criminal nature of the Nazi regime, and Hitler has a large number of Indian admirers. Nor does it pay attention to the Nazi genocide of Romanis, though they are of Indian origin. As we can see, the communalists were attracted to Germany’s method of dealing with ‘minorities’. This easy combination of ignorance and aspiration is also partly due to the sanitization of Nazism that flowed from Subhas Chandra Bose’s alliance with the Axis powers in the Second World War.⁷³

⁷² W.C. Smith, *Modern Islam in India*, p. 265.

⁷³ See Romain Hayes, *Subhas Chandra Bose in Nazi Germany* (New York, 2011). More on the militarization of Indian politics may be read here: <http://dilipsimeon.blogspot.in/2012/06/hard-rain-falling-on-death-of-tp.html>

As I have argued above, Indian communalism cannot be simply contraposed with nationalism. In fact, the doctrine of a 'natural' ethnic community forming the core of the nation-state lends itself to the hegemonic drives of communal ideologies. The ideologues of Hindutva have always seen it as equivalent to Indian nationalism. Nationalism has always been a deeply ambivalent ideology. Depending on the social forces which articulate it, it can be defensive or imperialist, tolerant or chauvinist, universalist or racist. It can contain all these elements because cultural and political homogeneity is a chimera. German nationalism was social-democratic up to 1848, autocratic in the Bismarckian era, liberal-democratic after 1918 and racist under Nazism. The dominant stream in each phase expressed different social interests and popular moods.

Communalism is the Indian version of fascist populism and racist nationalism. *First*, it opposes to the time of the present its own ideal time, which is an amalgam of the past and the future, fused together in myths of communal potency. Muslim communalists spoke of 'Muslim sovereignty' as if the medieval Sultanate was the property of every Muslim. Sikh communalists harked back to the reign of Maharaja Ranajit Singh, misrepresenting it as the rule of 'the Khalsa'. And Hindutva communalists dreamt of a fantastic monolith, the 'majority community', which, as their political property, would enable them to bludgeon all enemies into submission. As Savarkar wrote in 1924, 'thirty crores of people, with India as their Fatherland and Holy-land, can dictate their terms to the whole world. A day will come when mankind will have to face the force.'⁷⁴ *Second*, communalism locates an internal enemy, deemed to be sapping the strength of the chosen, and makes it the target of mass hatred. The communal imagination sees enemies lurking everywhere, whose physical destruction is the only guarantee of "national" safety. Genocide is a logical conclusion for the communalist temperament, and the massacres in colonial and post-colonial India (and Pakistan) demonstrate that inclination. *Third*, communalism subverts humanistic rationality and replaces it with romantic, death-worshipping cults of

⁷⁴ William Theodore de Bary, ed., *Sources of Indian Tradition* (Delhi, 1963) p. 887.

unreason whose political functions are the creation of murder squads, the militarisation of civil society and the racist reduction of their hate objects into sub-humans. *Fourth*, communalism uses radical slogans to mobilize mass support; and uses democratic institutions to seize power (or fragments of it) and destroy democracy from a position of strength. An important consequence of the spread of communal ideas is the appearance of bias in the judiciary. As Franz Neumann observed in his classic study of Nazism, '(the counter revolution)... tried many forms and devices, but soon learned that it could come to power only with the help of the state machine and never against it... in the centre of the counter revolution stood the judiciary.'⁷⁵ *Finally*, communalism energises the underworld with political tasks, links together hooligans and politicians, legitimises violence and institutionalises all these phenomena in stable organizations, creating the symbiosis between the state and the bestial personality which is the hallmark of fascism.

Ideology and annihilation

In her discussion of totalitarianism in power, Arendt discusses the existential predicament of human beings condemned to superfluity by ideologically driven authoritarian regimes:

The atmosphere of madness and unreality, created by an apparent lack of purpose, is the real iron curtain which hides all forms of concentration camps from the eyes of the world. Seen from outside, they and the things that happen in them can be described only in images drawn from a life after death, that is, a life removed from earthly purposes. Concentration camps can be very aptly divided into three types corresponding to three basic Western conceptions of a life after death: Hades, Purgatory, and Hell. To Hades corresponds those relatively mild forms, once popular even in nontotalitarian countries, for getting undesirable elements of all sorts – refugees, stateless persons, the asocial, and the unemployed – out of the

⁷⁵ Franz Neumann; 'Behemoth: The Structure and Practice of National Socialism'; New York; 1963, p 27. A pdf file may be read here: <http://www.unz.org/Pub/NeumannFranz-1942-00027>

way; as DP camps, which are nothing other than camps for persons who have become superfluous and bothersome, they have survived the war. Purgatory is represented by the Soviet Union's labour camps, where neglect is combined with chaotic forced labour. Hell in the most literal sense was embodied by those types of camps perfected by the Nazis, in which the whole of life was thoroughly and systematically organized with a view to the greatest possible torment. All three types have one thing in common: the human masses sealed off in them are treated as if they no longer existed, as if what happened to them were no longer of interest to anybody, as if they were already dead and some evil spirit gone mad were amusing himself by stopping them for a while between life and death before admitting them to eternal peace.⁷⁶

Arendt's observations show us a spectrum of annihilation contained within the phenomenon of 'concentration.' Annihilation does not always result in a sentence of death – rather, it refers to human beings 'treated as if they no longer existed', people who are undesirable and superfluous. Ghetto-fication is one end of the spectrum. For example, the relegation of so-called 'untouchables' in India to separate residential areas is a 'traditional' source of the politics of internment. Small and vast ghettos are to be found all over South Asia. They are occupied by refugees, troublesome 'minorities', etc. There are DP (displaced persons) camps all over the successor states of British India. There are also vast settlements of stateless persons, unwanted by any sovereign power. Further up the ladder of annihilation are the geographic zones of insurgency, whose defining feature is the suspension of law and constitutional protections (even if provisions for such protections exist on paper, which is not always the case). The exposure of these areas to perpetual violent conflict means that their populations exist on the border-line between superfluous life and sudden death.

⁷⁶ Arendt, *Origins*, p. 574.

Finally, there are the people caught up in the immediacy of so-called ‘communal riots’, the Indian euphemism for mass murder. The riot may last for days or longer, and are a display of genocidal intent. In recent years, such intent has also begun to be manifested in terror-bombings of crowds, which target innocent civilians in a random manner. (The very category of innocence has been communalized). Such events cannot destroy an entire community – but the display of intent is sufficient to push the survivors into a condition of lifelong trauma, or towards the status of superfluity – or both. As for those who get murdered, all we may say is that they passed through the Hell of fascism on their way to extinction.

The conditions under which people condemned to physical sequestration on account of being declared a *problem* or the bearers of a *question* have been replicated in South Asia not once but regularly, from colonial times through all the events that marked independence and the decades that followed. Forced labour was known well enough in India’s coal mines (during the Second World War) and elsewhere. This was not however, the result of an ideological project. But the status of minority that was accorded to millions of Indian, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and Sri Lankans was the first step that heralded an unfolding pattern. It is not my case that the label *minority* must inevitably lead to annihilation. But it cannot be denied that the so-called minorities must live with that ever-present danger. The arithmetical language by which the nation-state defines its own inhabitants ensures this.

Fascism in South Asia

Communal ideas have become normalized in South Asia. Memories of widespread and extreme violence before, during and after partition have contributed to this development.⁷⁷ The transfer of population and mass ethnic

⁷⁷ See Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India*; Delhi 2002 and Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia, Refugees, Boundaries, Histories* (New Delhi, 2008).

cleansing was a veritable marker of sovereignty for the two emergent nation-states. As one historian of partition comments:

While some argue that the violence that erupted at the moment of Partition was popular and spontaneous and that it can't be considered as a general phenomenon due to the non-involvement of large-scale organizations, the nature and the extent of the violence clearly underline the organized and planned character of the attacks. Furthermore, it suggests the involvement of private armies such as the Muslim League National Guard, the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) and the Akal Fauj.. Although the State did not directly participate in the violence, the communalized role of the police, the complicity if not direct involvement of the political leaderships and the State's attitude of laissez-faire point to its responsibility. During its existence, between August 1 and 31, the 50,000 men Punjab Boundary Force was unable or unwilling to maintain peace and order. Violence was not just a marginal phenomenon, a sudden and spontaneous communal frenzy that accompanied Partition. It was on the contrary at the very heart of the event. Nor was it merely a consequence of Partition but rather the principal mechanism for creating the conditions for Partition. *Violence constituted the moral instrument through which the tension between the pre-Partition local character of identity and its postcolonial territorial and national redefinition was negotiated. Violence operated as the link between the community and its new national territory.* That is precisely what gave it its organized and genocidal dimension as it was meant for control of social space so as to cleanse these territories from the presence of other religious communities⁷⁸ (Emphasis added).

⁷⁸ Lionel Baixas, 'Thematic Chronology of Mass Violence in Pakistan, 1947–2007', p. 2; available at <http://www.massviolence.org/Thematic-Chronology-of-Mass-Violence-in-Pakistan-1947-2007?decoupe_recherche=noakhali>

The project of ethnic cleansing is of course, never done. Once the nation-state is constituted, inter-nation animus takes over. India and Pakistan remain *internal* to each others ideological self-consciousness – it would not be off the mark to say that Partition disproved the Two Nation Theory. Thus, for Pakistan, the wickedness of Bharat and the Hindus is the necessary condition for its own existence; while for Hindutva fascists in India, the internal enemy are the ‘minorities’, primarily the Muslims, who are seen as Pakistani agents and an unclean element in the body politic. This attitude was widespread immediately following independence, but has remained prevalent for decades thereafter. It was commented upon Jawaharlal Nehru, soon after Purushottamdas Tandon won the presidency of the Congress in September 1950. Nehru deplored the fact that ‘communalist and reactionary forces’ had rejoiced at Tandon’s victory. ‘The spirit of communalism and revivalism has gradually invaded the Congress’, he said, ‘We have to treat our minorities in exactly the same way as we treat the majority.’⁷⁹ What is noticeable is his acknowledgement of the communal trend in the Congress, as well as the fact that the words *majority* and *minority* carried a symbolic charge, a habit that remains endemic in the discourse of the nation-state.

For its part, because Pakistan was constituted as a Muslim majority nation ⁸⁰ (despite Jinnah’s declaration in August 1947 that religion would now lose its significance), a relentless and deadly pursuit of theological purification was set in motion within its polity, a process that continues to this day. The state’s enforcement of religious doctrine is evident in Pakistan’s blasphemy law and the persecution of Ahmadiyas. The pressure upon its minority Hindu population that it’s Law Minister J.N. Mandal drew attention to in 1950 led to a prolonged exodus to India and a transformation of communal demography in both Pakistan and Bangladesh. These facts lend credence to stereotypes about Muslim intolerance.

⁷⁹ Ramchandra Guha; *India after Gandhi: the history of the world’s largest democracy*; Picador, 2007; p. 129-130. Also see Pandey; *Remembering Partition*, chapter 7, ‘Disciplining difference’

⁸⁰ See Venkat Dhulipala; ‘Debating Pakistan in Late Colonial North India’, *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 48/3; 2011; pp. 377–405.

They carry an ideological impact regardless of the fact that Pakistan and Bangladesh are independent and separate countries.

Communalist stereotypes are also strengthened by the persistence of the theatrical political stances adopted by conservative Indian Muslim leaders, some of whom continue to speak the language of hurt sentiment, and of a homogeneous community 'interest'. Demonstrations targeting religious groups such as the Ahmediyas, or writers denounced as blasphemers, or academic research deemed to be offensive, have been accompanied by threats of violence. Across the sub-continent, the violent activities of terror groups with international Islamist links have fed the climate of hate and intolerance.

On the other hand, the dominant trend within the Indian establishment is to treat Islamists as anti-national but the RSS and its allies as extreme patriots. This benign approach persists despite the fact that the last instance of RSS-inspired mass 'rioting' took place as recently as 2008. Organisations and individuals associated with the RSS have been accused of involvement in the bombing of a train with Pakistani passengers in 2007, in which 68 people died. The central question remains their addiction to violence, but this is always downplayed in public discussion. Whereas Maoist violence is condemned by all, the lawlessness of the RSS obtains support or sympathetic forbearance. Numbers of senior policemen, retired and in service, appear to be attracted to the ideology of Hindutva. We may note that the very ideal of a nation-state as the natural home of 'the majority' encourages the growth of such exclusivist concepts. In their communal form, therefore, extremist ideas have become respectable. People in high positions believe in collective guilt, mob violence and the efficacy of private armies.

What is also noticeable is the durable nature of the refusal to theorise communalism outside the minority/majority frame. The addiction to arithmetical vocabulary is prevalent across the political spectrum, not least on the Indian Left, and this despite the desperate warning issued by Dhanwantri and Joshi in 1947,

when Punjab's Communists spoke the language of humanity in the midst of a bloodbath. Of course, this is not a phenomenon limited to India and South Asia. The sacral language and idiom that informs nationalism (even in secular narratives) has not only breached, but shattered the internationalism and humanism of the Left. In India the retreat began with the CPI's conflation of religious and national identity, which further led to an advocacy of 'the rational essence of the Pakistan demand', as Adhikari put it in 1943.

The twentieth century has witnessed a prolonged and tactically sophisticated movement for the totalitarian transformation of South Asian politics. Opposing avatars of communalism run in tandem, and endless talk of minorities and majorities works like a magneto for generating animus, and undermining lawful governance and democratic institutions. This is why the partition of India and the history of Pakistan are a part of the same story. The ongoing criminalization of politics and state institutions cannot be comprehended in nation-statist frames – this is akin to trying to understand communalism through a communal lens. It has to be taken as a whole, because the language of majority and minority has entered public consciousness *across* the international boundaries drawn by Radcliffe in 1947. The secession of East Pakistan in 1971 and the Kashmir conflict (as also the repercussions of the Babri Mosque demolition in 1992), exemplify the continuing relevance of 1947 to the political history of the sub-continent. The Kashmir conflict may be understood better when seen as a product of contending nation-statist projects. As a result, its population has been subjected to a combination of ethnic cleansing on the one hand; and ruthless policing operations emanating from or enabled by state structures, on the other. Two competing nationalist ideologies have been at work here (and of late a third nationalism has emerged), attempting to mould an ideal 'people' out of an ethnically mixed population. 'Politics is the plastic art of the state.'

South Asian fascism has emerged in a political context more complex than the situation in pre-war Europe. This obliges us to rethink its elemental aspects. Here it is not a matter of a singular event such as a seizure of power by a fascist

dictator, but a slow bleeding process that builds its strength incrementally and notches up victories in what Gramsci called a war of position. Here, fascism depends upon a battle of ideas, upon ‘affirmation, repetition and contagion’. Here, it is not just mob violence but the climate of ideas that teaches us to expect such violence at all times, to justify it in a spirit of revenge, which provides energy to fascism. How far this ongoing decline has gone in the different successor states of British India is another debate.

Above all the de-facto preparation for civil war and the continued activity of militias and vigilante groups manifests a systematic attempt to militarize public space. War has now vacated the border – the place traditionally designated for it by the nation-state. It has spread inwards, into the entrails of the polity. There are conflict-zones within cities, areas referred to as ‘Pakistan’ and ‘Bangladesh’ merely on account of the identity of the people who live in them. There are lines of control in villages, marking the hostility between castes. Entire regions are affected by insurgency.⁸¹ Armed groups (with overt or covert ‘mainstream’ political links) operate in scores of urban and rural spaces. Some have embarked upon intermittent conflict with the state and obtain resources via taxes levied upon ordinary people, lower-level state officials and corporate interests. Others operate with greater stealth, showing their fangs in occasional outbursts of communal and ethnic strife, as in the recent violence between Bodos and Bengali-speaking Muslims in Assam. Yet others enjoy varying degrees of state support or tolerance, depending on the interests and classes that willed them into existence. The largest private army, the RSS, aims at nothing less than the conquest of state power in the name of Hindu Rashtra.

Liberal democracy sits uneasily with nationalism. The communal project attempts to overthrow the very idea of democracy, and communal ideas are an effective means of introducing partisanship and bias into state institutions. In India the fascist thrust of communalism struck at the very moment of

⁸¹ See Anuradha Chenoy and Kamal Mitra Chenoy, *Maoist and Other Armed Conflicts*, New Delhi, 2010.

independence, creating millions of refugees and stateless people even as the people were declared sovereign. To cite Arendt again,

The notion that statelessness is primarily a Jewish problem was a pretext used by all governments who tried to settle the problem by ignoring it. None of the statesmen was aware that Hitler's solution of the Jewish problem, first to reduce the German Jews to a nonrecognized minority in Germany, then to drive them as stateless people across the borders, and finally to gather them back from everywhere in order to ship them to extermination camps, was an eloquent demonstration to the rest of the world how really to "liquidate" all problems concerning minorities and stateless. After the war it turned out that the Jewish question, which was considered the only insoluble one, was indeed solved – namely, by means of a colonised and then conquered territory – but this solved neither the problems of the minorities nor the stateless. On the contrary, like virtually all other events of the twentieth century, the solution of the Jewish question merely produced a new category of refugees, the Arabs, thereby increasing the number of the stateless by another 700,000 to 800,000 people. And what happened in Palestine within the smallest territory and in terms of hundreds of thousands was then repeated in India on a large scale involving many millions of people. Since the Peace Treaties of 1919 and 1920 the refugees and the stateless have attached themselves like a curse to all the newly established states on earth which were created in the image of the nation-state.

For these new states this curse bears the germ of a deadly sickness. For the nation-state cannot exist once its principle of equality before the law has broken down. Without this legal equality, which originally was destined to replace the older laws and orders of the feudal society, the nation dissolves into an anarchic mass of over- and under-privileged individuals. The clearer the proof of their inability to treat stateless people as legal persons and the greater the extension of arbitrary rule by police decree, the more

difficult it is for states to resist the temptation to deprive all citizens of legal status and rule them with an omnipotent police.⁸²

Despite the terrible conflicts that have spread in India today, the Indian constitution is by no means a dead letter – certainly not yet. But the rights promised by it to all Indians are increasingly denied to millions of citizens. Democracy has sunk roots, but so have projects that seek to undermine it. Communal discourses aim at the conquest of the state by exclusivist ideas of the “Nation”. The defining element of these projects is the dynamic of violence directed against the nation’s enemies, who for the most part, are searched for *within* the country’s borders. This dynamic functions as a self-fulfilling prophecy – the denial of constitutionally protected fundamental rights to vast numbers of citizens will ensure that people denied justice will view the state as inimical to their interests. Fascism is a machine for the endless production of enemies.

The argument presented here is intended to dispel apocalyptic theorizations of fascism, and point instead towards the dynamic interplay of ideas, movements, outbreaks of violence and state complicity. The attack on the Indian constitution by a section of the far left works only to complement a project that sections of the Indian establishment have already undertaken – with greater chances of success.

⁸³ The defence of democracy in India implies a resistance to fascism and the ideas, interests and conditions that promote it. It implies a protection of human rights, civil liberties, freedom of speech and belief, trade-union rights and non-violent resolution of conflicts. It requires resistance to mob violence, vigilantism and the totalitarian idea of ‘majority rule.’ All this requires that we recognize the danger. Communalism was (and remains) a rope of infinite length, elastic over time, which connects elite interests with mass sentiment. The rope is handled by ‘the masses’, for many of whom the experience bestows a sense of potency, a

⁸² Arendt, *Origins*, p. 368

⁸³ See Jairus Banaji, ‘Fascism, Maoism and the Democratic Left’
<http://infochangeindia.org/governance/analysis/fascism-maoism-and-the-democratic-left.html>

fantasy of secure kinship and future power. But whereas affinity for one's culture and kin is the substance of everyday life, the tension running through this rope is marked by the noose at the end of it.

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